

*If It's for My
Daughter, I'd
Even Defeat a
Demon Lord* 7

CHIROLU

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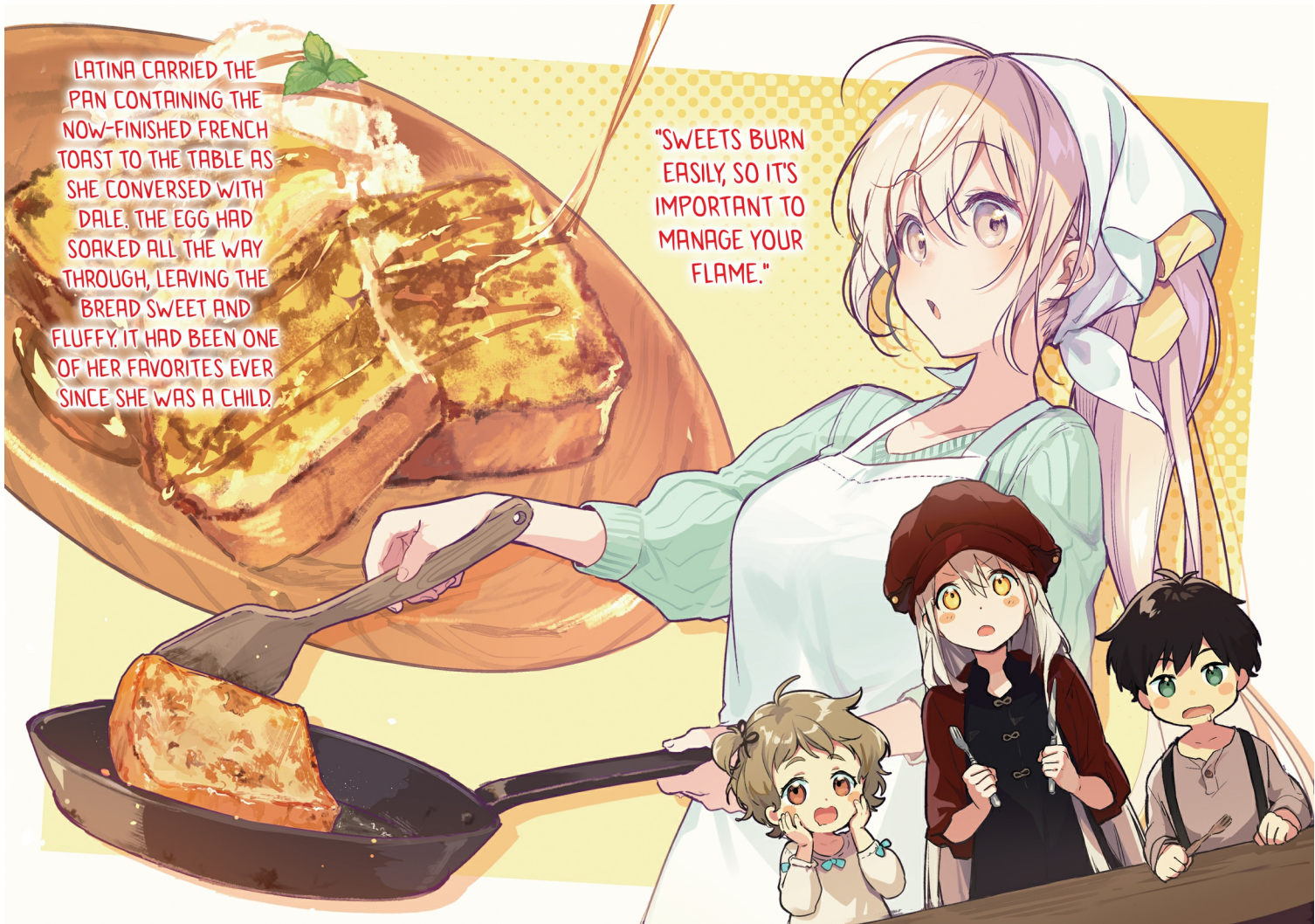
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"IT
DOESN'T
LOOK
WEIRD?"

THE HIGH-CLASS SILK
FABRIC DREW GENTLE
CONTOURS. THE WIDE
SLEEVES SWUNG ALONG-
SIDE HER MOVEMENTS,
MAKING THE BEAUTIFUL
PATTERNS DRAWN ON
THEM STAND OUT
ALL THE MORE.



LATINA CARRIED THE PAN CONTAINING THE NOW-FINISHED FRENCH TOAST TO THE TABLE AS SHE CONVERSED WITH DALE. THE EGG HAD SOAKED ALL THE WAY THROUGH, LEAVING THE BREAD SWEET AND FLUFFY. IT HAD BEEN ONE OF HER FAVORITES EVER SINCE SHE WAS A CHILD.

"SWEETS BURN EASILY, SO IT'S IMPORTANT TO MANAGE YOUR FLAME."

AS AN
ANIMAL LOVER,
LATINA COMPLETELY
LOST ANY URGE TO
REMARK ON THE
CURRENT SITUATION,
INSTEAD BENDING
HER LEGS AND
SCOOPING UP ALL
THREE FURBALLS
AT ONCE.

"WAH..."



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1: Sequel: The Platinum-haired Maiden and the Delicious Breakfast

After a lot happened (later historians would sigh if they heard the events summed up in that manner), Dale and Latina returned to their everyday lives in Kreuz.

On the day of their return, the pair had an early dinner before the bar entered into its main sales period at night. As Latina served as the “adorable waitress” of the Dancing Ocelot, and Dale often didn’t return till nighttime because of his work, they often ate dinner during the break periods when there were lulls in the amount of business. However, there would surely be a lot of customers packed into the bar on that night. There may not even be a short moment to take a break. It was incredibly easy to imagine.

Even if the owners said “don’t come,” a statement which should never be uttered by people in the service business, it would surely have no effect. In fact, even now a portion of the regulars had entrenched themselves in part of the customer seating and were waiting, even though there wasn’t anything going on at the moment.

Thinking in the back of his mind that the amount of preparations needing to be done would definitely increase and planning accordingly, the owner Kenneth thought that, though it was wrong to have her do so this soon after her return, he’d need to have Latina give her all to help out. But in order to do so, he’d need to provide her with fuel first. For that “fuel,” Kenneth whipped up dinner as quickly as always, and then laid it out on the table in the corner of the kitchen.

“Woaaaaow!” The voice that Latina let out in that moment was more out of sheer joy than admiration. After checking the contents of the plate, she bounded over to grab some bread. She placed a large round loaf atop the cutting board, and then inserted her knife into it with a somewhat serious expression on her face.

Kenneth stocked several varieties of bread from a bakery he was familiar with in the kitchen, to match with different dishes. Seeing what the meal would be, Latina chose a plain white bread to pair with it.

Latina placed the basket with a heap of bread in it on the table and took her seat, seemingly unable to contain her excitement. It felt likely she would even break into her usual slightly off-key humming.

“It’s nothing all that special...” Kenneth said, looking a little perplexed by how Latina was so overjoyed as he laid out the rest of the meal he had made. Latina looked up at Kenneth with a look that said she clearly wasn’t overreacting at all.

“It’s my first time having your cooking in a long time!”

“Well, I suppose that’s true, but still...”

“Why can’t you understand just how amazing this is...?” Latina asked, her eyes tearing up just a bit.

Perplexed by Latina’s excessive response, Kenneth looked over at Dale who was seated at her side, but he didn’t seem to find it strange at all, and just gave a strained smile instead.

“It was... a little rough over there...”

“I feel bad for Chrysos, but I really just couldn’t live in Vassilios...”

Latina usually had fantastic manners, but now she unusually picked up a slice of bread and bit right in to it. She then chewed it thoroughly, awash with emotion.

“Dale, it’s so delicious...!”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

Dale was reverting back to his old doting idiot self, stroking the head of that girl, who had recovered a bit from the awful state she had been in back in Vassilios, like one would do to a small child. Even so, the air about Latina now was such that anyone, not just a doting idiot like Dale, would want to do likewise.

“...What happened?”

Kenneth was starting to think something serious had occurred without them knowing, only for Dale to face him with a strained smile.

“How should I put it...? The food in Vassilios was extraordinarily bad.”

“...huh?”

“It was so unappetizing that it was shocking.”

“...I see.”

It was decidedly *not* a serious matter. However, that most definitely wasn't the case for those who had faced it.

“The food... it's good... so good...”

The tears of joy Latina shed when she started eating clearly told part of the story.

She had successfully completed her mission of spreading the jam that Kenneth had carefully prepared atop the bread, as if striving to push the bread to the limit of its surface tension. Then, she stuffed it in her mouth, and the tears really started flowing.

When she took a bite of the grilled chicken that had been marinated with herbs and spices, the overflowing juices filled her mouth and she trembled with emotion.

Latina had always enjoyed trying new things, like pondering how it would be alternating very sweet and salty foods. She also liked to give each food its own time, in order to sample the flavor thoroughly. It was extremely rare to see her shovel food into her mouth without stopping like she was currently doing.



“Weren’t you in Vassilios’s palace?”

“This food is so delicious...”

“I suppose it was something like a royal castle, and it wasn’t as if we were treated poorly.”

The place they had stayed was a temple of Banafsaj, but at the same time it was also the “palace” of the ruler of the nation, the First Demon Lord. It differed greatly in style from those of Laband, but there was no issue in thinking of it as a “castle.”

And Dale had sensed that because Chrysos doted on her sister Latina, they were treated as if they were nobles while they were there.

“That was why that awful taste was so surprising.”

“If you’re willing to say all that, then you’ve actually roused my interest...”

Seeing Kenneth thinking with a serious look on his face, Latina gulped down the contents of her mouth and then flatly replied, “Eating food from Vassilios makes you really appreciate the feeling of happiness eating a good meal gives you.”

“That sure is an assertion...”

“Chrysos is working real hard, so I think there should be a cultural exchange with Laband. Especially food culture... please... let the food culture improve...”

Latina heaped jam upon the next piece of bread, too.

“This food... is so delicious...”

“You just keep saying that...”

“When I was little, that was the norm... When I came to Kreuz, I came to understand that the circumstances I lived in weren’t quite normal, and I figured that may have been the same for the food,” Latina said with a distant gaze, with a sort of enlightenment about her.

“I see...”

Latina hadn’t questioned the circumstances under which she was born and raised when she was young. She had spent every day living a quiet life with her

kind parents and twin sister, attended by adults who were a bit formal. She was young and that was the only “normal” she had known, so she hadn’t questioned it.

When she came to Kreuz, where every day was so lively and busy, she also saw the lives of her friends and realized that the circumstances she was born and raised under were unique. She was also properly aware that those circumstances differed from those of princesses from within picture books, because her mother was a high-ranking priestess and they had lived in a temple of Banafsaj.

As a strict yet fair man, her late father Smaragdi had firmly taught his young daughters that the authority their mother held as grand priestess was not their own, as they were separate people despite being family. One of the things that Smaragdi especially hated were people who threw around the authority of others and acted arrogantly.

When it was determined via prophecy that one of his daughters would become the ruler of the nation, that meant at the same time that the other girl would not be chosen. The way that their parents had raised their daughters strictly, so that they could walk their own differing paths, was an expression of their deep love.

And since Latina had grown up to have truly flexible thinking, having taken in the differing values of a foreign country along the way, she was able to conjecture on the circumstances she had lived in when she was young. From the threat of the Second Demon Lord mentioned by her parents and the fact that the previous First Demon Lord had been killed, she had been able to guess that they had been raised in the depths of the temple because neither she nor her twin sister Chrysos would have become the next First Demon Lord.

The food culture in Laband and her motherland might have differed greatly, but it was possible that the food she had experienced while being raised in secret in the depths of the temple had been unique in and of itself. Sooner or later, that was what Latina had come to think.

But in this latest stay there, Latina became painfully aware that that wasn’t the case, and that the quality of the food culture of her homeland was truly

disappointing.

“My position in Vassilios is complicated, so I’m scared of getting involved in politics... and I’m even more afraid that Chrysos will be influenced by my words.”

That fear was a big reason behind why Latina had been so insistent on returning to Kreuz. Chrysos would deny it, and Latina didn’t think as seriously on the matter as she had before, but her past as a “criminal” who had been exiled couldn’t be overturned. There were surely many people in that nation who wouldn’t view that fact favorably.

Just as some humans had a deep-seated aversion to other races, it wasn’t easy to get rid of the distaste for those whose horns, the revered symbols of the devil race, had been injured. In that nation, the readily visible punishment of having one’s horn broken held great significance.

As someone whose very existence was such a delicate matter, it was impossible to deny that if she stayed too close by the side of Chrysos, the king, then it may lead to her sister facing more distrust than she normally would. As a smart, kind girl by nature, that fact wasn’t something that Latina could turn a blind eye towards.

“It’s not as if we can never meet... and the situation will surely change once Chrysos’s rule stabilizes, but... for now, Kreuz is still the only place for me to say ‘I’m home.’”

Latina smiled, then ate a spoonful of the soup stuffed full of plenty of vegetables that was a staple of the Ocelot. Of course, Kenneth wasn’t her mother, but to Latina, this taste was something like “mom’s home cooking.”

“And... it was really rough, since the food in Vassilios was so bad.”

“So you came on back.”

“Sure enough, I could never tell Chrysos... that I couldn’t stay in Vassilios because the food tasted so awful...”

Latina had grown up in the Dancing Ocelot, which took pride in its cooking even amongst the restaurants of Kreuz, so the quality of meals was incredibly important to her. Ever since the shock of that first bite of Kenneth’s cooking,

rather than aimlessly enjoying food, she had continued to strive to learn to cook on her own, diligently devoting herself to the task.

That was all for the sake of deliciousness.

“It would have been preferable if they would have just let me handle things, but that wasn’t a possibility...”

“Yeah, I can’t imagine they ever would have let you.”

Everyone associated with the Ocelot was already aware of the fact that Latina’s sister was the Golden King, the ruler of Vassilios. Working in the kitchen was generally considered a job meant for subordinates. Kenneth took pride in his work, but his way of thinking didn’t match up with that of the world at large.

“Still, Latina, you did go into the kitchen from time to time, right?” Dale interjected. Latina averted her gaze, seemingly feeling awkward.

†

After becoming an extraordinary being as the retainer of the Eighth Demon Lord, Dale became able to keep on acting with hardly any sustenance or sleep. Thanks in part to that, he at first paid no attention at all to the state of food in Vassilios. He didn’t have time to be worrying about taste, and was only concerned with whether or not he got that bare minimum amount of nutrition needed. Washing down the portable rations he had on hand with water had been plenty. All of his time and thoughts had been devoted to watching over Latina, in what felt like one long day spent in a dream. Or rather, it should be said that just looking at Latina had been enough to fulfill Dale at that point. He had prioritized that special medicine for his Latina deficiency over the three great necessities of food, sex, and sleep.

Before long Latina had started to recover and became able to move around, which is when the two of them paid attention to the matter of food.

When she first chewed the food, more than a face that said it was disgusting, Latina wore an expression of great sadness. It was a truly disappointed reaction.

Propped up by the pillow provided atop the bed, Latina looked at the food on the plate carried in by a lady-in-waiting, and her expression shifted to a depressed one. Dale wasn’t used to seeing her like that.

“...Latina?”

“The food... isn’t good...” Latina let slip as she muttered to herself in a tearful voice, as she brought the spoon slowly closer to her mouth. Dale’s initial reaction upon hearing that was to think that she still wasn’t back to her usual self.

Dale had watched over Latina ever since she was little, and when she ate, it brought joy even to the onlookers seeing her eat. And so, he thought that she must not have recovered enough yet to properly enjoy a meal.

Dale came to properly understand her statement when she had recovered further and became able to sit at the dining table alongside him. They had been in the habit of eating together for many years now. His own need to eat a secondary concern in the matter, Dale naturally decided to eat alongside her.

And after taking a bite of the meal provided, Dale unthinkingly yelled out, “That’s awful!”

It was then that Dale had a sudden realization.

Latina apparently wasn’t fond of saying something tasted bad. She respected cooking, and was deeply fond of food.

“Wow... it’s shockingly bad...”

Dale bluntly voiced his true feelings because the only ones currently in the villa serving as Latina’s private room were the girl herself and the devil ladies-in-waiting. Unlike Chrysos, they were unable to understand the language of humans, Western Continental, which Dale generally used.

The food laid out atop the table looked different even from a simple glance. As a result, Dale had been completely unable to guess at how it would taste. However, he had never expected it would taste this bad.

“Latina... what is this?”

“It’s called ***. It’s... supposed to be made by cooking ***** together with ***.”

“Well then what about this...?”

“I believe... it’s *****. It’s made by pickling ***** meat in *** and ***** and

then cooking it.”

The majority of the key information was in devil language, making it utterly incomprehensible to him.

The dish Dale had first indicated seemed to be a gruel made out of some sort of grain. He couldn't quite identify the paste-like substance with bits of grain floating here and there throughout. It hardly had any flavor to it. It was hard to swallow, though, and had a texture about it that was incredibly difficult to describe. The gritty bits of grain left half-done in the dish were also incomprehensible.

The next thing Dale pointed out he could at least identify as a sort of meat dish.

Having come from a clan of hunters, he first realized that the meat had been poorly handled. They apparently hadn't even prepared it properly. The stench of it was terribly strong; furthermore, the juices had been extracted, leaving it all dry, and it was overly spiced with herbs, giving it the bitter taste and scent of medicine.

Put bluntly, it was awful.

Dale wasn't left thinking that opinion was solely because he was a human, since he saw Latina squirming with a sad look on her face as she chewed the hard meat.

“In Vassilios... the most delicious food is the ***** fruit.”

“You just eat it as is?”

“Yeah...”

That couldn't be called cooking.

In that way, Dale had come to learn how awful the food culture in Vassilios was.

“Back when I was a kid... this was how our meals were... so this was normal for me. So when I first ate Kenneth's cooking, I was really surprised. There were so many different flavors.”

Dale found it a hard thing to comment on, leaving him making a face like he

was having trouble figuring out what to say. And so, Latina had spoken with an awkward, powerless smile on her face.

Dale thought back on when Latina had first eaten in Kreuz. It was true that her eyes had gleamed when she saw the dessert that Kenneth had made. The adorableness of little Latina looking up at him with sparkling eyes as if to report how happy she was had tightly grabbed hold of his heart. He had just happened to pick her up, but after seeing such a wide, innocent smile pointed at him, it was no surprise that he couldn't ever consider letting her go. Yeah, there was no helping it. That was the absolute truth.

"You really were cute back then... Right, so... what about sweets...?"

"I can't remember there being anything but fruit..."

"I see..."

At the time, Dale had thought Latina's reaction was excessive, but he'd figured it was because she had been in the harsh environment of that forest, where she had been unable to have a proper meal. But for her, the culture shock had been an even greater part of that experience.

"Apparently... not many crops can be grown in Vassilios. But for devils, even adult males don't need as much food as humans, so... things work out somehow, I think," Latina said, looking like she was remembering back on her past. Latina hadn't studied such matters in detail, but by matching up what she had heard from her father and observed from her surroundings with what she had seen and heard after going to Laband, she figured her thoughts on the matter couldn't have been off by much.

"Right, it is surrounded by arid land..." Dale replied, remembering the vast desert he had seen from atop Hagel's back. With divine protection from Quirmizi, one could expect a sufficient harvest even from a land like this, but that wasn't a method that could be counted on forever.

The amount of crops that could be harvested in a harsh land like Vassilios were limited. And as a country that refused all exchange with foreign nations, they weren't able to import food. As a result, and since what they could obtain was limited, they didn't see meals as something to enjoy, but rather a means of taking in the minimal amount of necessary nutrition.

The young Latina wasn't aware of this, but the previous First Demon Lord was a ruler with a rather conservative way of thinking. The fundamental stances of that previous government were maintained untouched until Chrysos was enthroned as the new demon lord, which affected the country's political situation.

Meanwhile, Kreuz was an especially prosperous town even for a country like Laband. It served as a relay point between the port and the capital, and as a crucial place in terms of distribution, it was rich in goods.

On top of that, Latina's mentor was Kenneth, a man who dedicated himself to gathering and experimenting with foods and recipes from all sorts of regions. His first-rate skills as an adventurer and a heavy warrior had been nothing more than means towards that goal. In fact, shortly after encountering his greatest objective in terms of rare ingredients (a type of dragon that lived in the ocean), he readily married into running the Dancing Ocelot and retired as an adventurer. There were many who voiced their disappointment, as he was still young to be retiring from that job and had shown great skill as a party leader, but he paid them no heed. He had decided to live the rest of his life as a chef.

The place where Kenneth displayed his skills was the Dancing Ocelot. It was a shop with a menu with all sorts of recipes and dishes that you would normally never be able to see in a bar in the rougher part of town.

That was the sort of place that Latina had grown up in.

Latina was no longer able to return to the food culture of her old home in Vassilios.

"Oh yeah... How is Rose handling meals...?" Dale muttered, and Latina's gaze wandered. After making a terribly conflicted face, Latina soon looked down powerlessly. Her feelings really did show clearly on her face.

"I feel like... it would be a problem... if I didn't eat the food Chrysos provided..."

"Well, considering your current position... Chrysos may not care too much herself, but there's no guarantee that everyone else would see it that way."

Whether or not someone would eat the food provided indicated the lack or

presence of trust. No matter the reason, if Latina refused food offered by Chrysos, it would be like declaring to others that she didn't trust her sister, the king. Latina realized it was precisely because she had the backing of her sister that she was able to act freely, so she also understood that issue.

However, as she and her group had periodic exchanges with Laband, it wouldn't be strange at all for Rose to have foodstuffs from there. Even rations and preserved foods would still be far more edible compared to food from Vassilios.

That line of thinking caused Latina to grow further conflicted.

She ended up rather easily yielding to her desires. It wasn't as if she was some purely noble saint, as she was more of a commoner awash in the desires of everyday life.

"Hmm♪ Hmm♪ Hmmm♪" Latina happily hummed to herself, almost skipping down the hall.

She had visited her friend Sylvia just before. Because she had a commoner's way of thinking to her, no matter how close to Rose she may have been, she couldn't bring herself to go up to a noble lady of Laband, who acted as an envoy for the nation, and say "please give me food."

However, it was a whole different story when it came to her friend.

Ever since she was a child, Latina never stopped feeling that she needed to be a good girl. Everything about her had been denied, and she was exiled from the place where she had been born, so she understood just how precious everything that Dale and the other adults at the Ocelot had given her was. If she was a "bad girl," then she might lose all of that happiness. She feared losing everything once again more than anything else.

As a result, she had trouble bringing herself to complain to adults, but she had grumbled plenty of issues and idle complaints suitable to her age to her friends. And she was also especially earnest with Sylvia, openly voicing her complaints.

Looking completely and utterly downhearted, Latina told her friend, "The food isn't good..."

Hearing that, Sylvia burst out in a hearty laugh.

Just a little while ago, Latina had complained to her how it was a hassle having ladies-in-waiting involved in every little thing she did, from changing clothes to just taking a short walk. She had thought so at that time too, but it was just too ridiculous of a statement to hear from the sister of Vassilios's ruler.

"It's bad enough that I can't help but laugh at the matter... But hey, so you're saying it's bad even with a devil's sense of taste?"

Sylvia had still wondered if it could be a difference in the tastes preferred by humans and devils, but Latina gave a powerless shake of her head with a depressed look on her face.

"It's not a good taste... Um, I can understand that because I have other things to compare it to, so I know what tastes good and what doesn't. But here, that's just the way food is..."

"It's not as if it's so awful I can't get it down, but it really is impressively unpleasant."

In theory, it was carrying out its role as food. Actually, it gave the impression that it was doing precisely the bare minimum required.

"Hmm... Latina."

"What is it?"

"I do have some candy."

"Waaaaah!"

Seeing her friend in such low spirits had caused Sylvia to recall what she had on hand. She pulled out a small candy-filled bottle that was buried amongst the books and documents cluttering her desk. As it provided a quick source of energy, it was a necessity for priestesses of Akhdar. She pulled out one and offered it, causing Latina's eyes to sparkle as she opened her mouth, looking like a young child.

"Is it tasty?"

"Yeah!"

"I'm glad to hear it."

It felt akin to giving food to a small animal.

Apparently, Latina got a great deal of happiness from this first bit of flavor in a while, having had the joy of a proper meal stolen away from her. She seemed to have reverted to a bit more of a childlike state, rolling the candy about inside her mouth with a happy look on her face.

“Now that I think of it...” Sylvia muttered and stood up, then rummaged through her own luggage, which she had tossed into the corner of the room. Before long, she pulled out a plain looking tin.

“Hmm?”

While Latina looked on with confusion, Sylvia opened it and a particular scent wafted through the air.

“Alright... it’s still good. This is all I’ve got right now, but do you want it?”

Latina understood what it was that was in the tin, so her friend’s words caused her to become overcome with emotion. She held her hands together in prayer and she looked at Sylvia with teary eyes.

“Sylvia... you’re like a goddess...”

That sort of comment most certainly wasn’t the sort of thing that should be said by a demon lord, a lower-ranking god.



As a result of all of that, Latina ended up walking down the hall while humming along. Her skipping had a rather unique feel to it, thanks to her peculiar sense of rhythm.

“I’m so, so happy, it’s butter♪ It’s real salty, so just a little♪”

While improvising those unique lyrics, Latina pressed on into the kitchen. As a result of her daily walks throughout the temple, she had confirmed its location.

When she discovered the kitchen she stared in, gloomily lost in thought, and eventually ended up polishing pots, though she didn’t regret that. After all, from Latina’s point of view, that was incredibly enjoyable to do. The more effort she put in, the more they sparkled, visibly showing the fruits of her effort. The start of things was Latina finding a burned pot in the corner of the kitchen, and she then ended up polishing every pot she laid eyes on thoroughly.

This place was a temple, so there was hardly anything around meant for amusement. And even though Latina could speak the devil language, she didn’t know how to read or write, so books were out too. She was exiled when she was young, so she didn’t have a chance to learn the written language. No matter how smart she may have been, there was nothing she could do about that.

As a result, Latina had far too much free time on her hands. She just didn’t have anything to do.

Chrysos still didn’t understand that to get a workaholic like Latina to take it easy, giving her a moderate amount of work was the most effective method.

As an aside, when Dale saw Chrysos throwing herself so hard at her work as ruler to get through it so she could make time to spend with Latina, he thought that the two sisters really were quite similar.

Latina had found something to do for the first time in a while. She had crumbled before the twin desires of food and a way to kill time.

The lady-in-waiting accompanying her was at a loss as to how to deal with Latina’s actions and was left nervously following along after her, but in her current state, Latina didn’t even notice the woman. From the lady-in-waiting’s point of view, Latina’s actions were a “sudden eccentricity of the Platinum

Princess.”

With light footsteps, she entered into an area that was part of the temple but was a place that the elite would never visit, where servants carried out miscellaneous affairs. The mysterious tune she hummed to herself was one that the woman had never before heard in devil culture. Perhaps it came from human culture. For just what purpose had the humans created such a melody, though?

It was no surprise that the lady-in-waiting would be left confused. Latina’s actions defied her understanding, after all. And confusing matters further was the fact that the Golden King, who was soft on her sister, ordered the woman to abide by Latina’s will to the best of her ability. But with that said, from Chrysos’s point of view, it was only natural to be waited on, and she would never consider doing any work of the sort meant for servants. And so, neither Chrysos nor the ladies-in-waiting had ever considered that Latina would enjoy such work and wish to do so.

The differences in the way they were raised showed in that.

As a result, the lady-in-waiting was left unable to comprehend Latina’s intentions, much less stop her. It made for quite a worrying situation for the woman.

Latina was in such high spirits because in one hand she held the tin with the butter, while in the other she had a small bottle.

“Sylvia really is kind, to even give me honey♪”

Even her monologue then was a part of her tune.

Latina had been so happy that Sylvia couldn’t help but offer her treasured bottle of honey. Latina had been just too excited over a single partially-used tin of butter, causing Sylvia to feel almost guilty somehow. And she also couldn’t help but feel a little sympathy for Latina, seeing how she’d been forced into such a corner.

With the tin of butter in one hand and the bottle of honey in the other, Latina set aside her usual hesitation that she would have about intruding on the workplace of others. In other words, she charged right into the kitchen.

The first thing Latina did after entering the kitchen was put up her hair. That was a teaching from her master, and she saw it as one of her responsibilities. In truth, she also wanted to put on an apron, but she wasn't able to prepare such a thing.

Next, she placed a bit of the butter in her mouth to check it. It was far saltier than the butter that was normally used in Kreuz. Kenneth had taught her that that was how items in tins were, though, to make them last longer, so she wasn't surprised.

"Sure enough, the flavor has dropped compared to fresh butter..."

Even so, that first bit of flavor in some time caused her heart to dance.

"With just this, it would probably be hard to make a pastry... and this is all the honey I have, too," she muttered to herself, starting to rummage around the kitchen as she did so.

Latina had made up her mind not to misuse Chrysos's authority as ruler, but during this time alone, she was ready to use whatever she needed to. And so, she ended up pilfering foodstuffs from the kitchen, an incredibly petty bit of embezzlement. It was so light an amount that it would be awkward to try to lay blame on her for doing so.

"This grain... it doesn't have much taste, so... maybe I should try baking it?"

Latina had taken the grain powder used to make the staple gruel-like dish and added an appropriate amount of water and tried mixing it. She had really wanted to use something like milk, but she couldn't find anything fitting that description, unfortunately.

The dough had a stickier texture than it would have had it been made with wheat flour, and it was obvious at just a glance that it hadn't been milled uniformly.

"It might work out a bit better with some sifting..."

Her thoughts hastened on the matter of how she could prepare and cook it.

She dropped a bit of her precious butter onto the heated metal pan, and it soon melted, letting off a pleasant aroma. Smelling that scent for the first time

in a while caused her to feel exhilarated. She carefully added the dough to the pan, and it made a high-pitched sizzle. Normally, she would temporarily remove the pan from the flame so that the heat could drop, but just as predicted, the highly sticky dough was running on the thick side. It would surely be fine, even with this level of heat.

What Latina had created was a sort of pseudo-crepe made from flour and water.

No matter how much Latina may have polished her cooking skills, there was a limit to what she could make while improvising without any preparation. She hardly even had anything to serve as proper ingredients to start with.

Even so, when she lightly spread butter atop and drizzled on some honey, a scent wafted off the dish that aroused her appetite. It had been a depressingly long time since a smell had such an effect on her.

It was bad manners to dig into food while standing, but she did it to taste it rather than to steal a bite before sitting down to eat it properly. Especially when it came to something she was making for the first time, it was only natural for a professional to check her work.

Latina shed a few tears.

The dough had been lacking in taste, so the saltiness of the butter actually worked to her advantage. The honey gradually permeated the taste buds of Latina, who had been starved for sweetness.

“It’s edible...” she muttered, a truly depressing statement. Latina ate all of it and then fried up another batch with the remaining batter and went running to Dale.

“Dale!”

“Y-yeah...?”

Latina was supposed to have gone off to have an open conversation with her friend Sylvia, but she had returned carrying a plate, leaving Dale perplexed.

With that said, when she offered him the plate with a wide grin on her face, he had no option but to smile back.

“Dale... I made this. Will you give it a try?”

“I could never say that I didn’t want your home cooking, but... you made it...?”

It was a virtue of hers that she was always earnest and couldn’t tell a lie, but Dale’s smile was an unusually lukewarm one, having sensed what was going on.

“So you... went into the kitchen...?”

“Just for a bit. It wasn’t for long!”

It was awkward for Latina as well, so she tried to desperately stress the extenuating circumstances as she gave her explanation.

“Um, it probably won’t be so good when it gets cold, so please eat it while it’s hot.”

“Right.”

That was the reason that Latina had hurried back to the room from the kitchen. The lady-in-waiting, who was completely at her mercy, was left out of the loop.

She had folded the batter in half over itself and made them a smallish size to make it easier to eat, and just touching it had been enough to convey its stickiness. A portion of her skill as a chef could be seen in the way that they were all nearly identical sizes.

As Dale brought one of the offered crepes to his mouth, a sweet scent wafted through the air. As he chewed, the saltiness of the butter and a gentle sweetness filled his mouth.

“I want to say anything and everything you make is delicious, but...”

“Yeah,” Latina said with a nod, holding the same food as Dale in both hands and stuffing her cheeks.

“It’s not exactly mindblowingly tasty, is it?”

“Right. It’s not all that great.”

Latina was aware that the ingredients she had on hand had been limited, so she wasn’t hurt by Dale’s words. She was able to accurately assess the dishes

that she made.

“Still... it’s been a while since I’ve been able to have proper food...”

Despite any flaws, it was still freshly baked, and compared to the food offered by Vassilios, it was far more akin to actual food.

“Yeah...” Latina said with a nod, her eyes tearing up a bit. “Meals really are precious...” said the ruler of the nation’s beloved sister earnestly while continuing to nod.

Dale couldn’t help but feel that something about that was extremely misplaced, but he didn’t point that out.

Sure enough, Latina wasn’t able to take the task of cleaning up the plate away from the lady-in-waiting. Even so, she didn’t get discouraged, instead starting to work away in a corner of the villa. Looking at her, Dale saw she was lining up several containers she had likely pilfered from the kitchen. Finding that strange, Dale peeked inside and spotted some manner of fruit immersed in water.

“What’s that...?”

“I’m trying a bit of an experiment. Don’t touch it or move it, alright?”

“Y-yeah...”

It was rare for Latina to be so blunt and speak so firmly. Dale pulled back the hand he’d been reaching out and gave a single nod.

“***, *****” Latina ordered in a somewhat forceful tone, having faced the lady-in-waiting near the entrance to the room. Dale guessed that the woman was receiving the same instructions that he had been given, not to touch the containers.

“**”

“*****”

Latina’s gaze remained fixed on the woman, and her tone was clearly threatening. She was kind by nature, so it was rare to hear her address someone that way.

Dale thought for a moment, before giving a satisfied nod.

It's because it's food-related...

The conclusion he had come to seemed ridiculous.

Latina firmly sealed the containers, then devoted herself to observation. She frequently used magic to adjust their temperature, seemingly very meticulous about the process.

From Dale's perspective, it was bizarre seeing those containers lined up in a corner of the elegant villa.

For the devil ladies-in-waiting, these actions were even more incomprehensible. For better or worse, Dale had grown used to Latina's occasional astounding actions. The glances the ladies-in-waiting shared with him, though, showed they were at a total loss for how to deal with the matter.

Latina paid utterly no heed to their glances as she continued to happily check on the containers each day.

And as long as Latina was enjoying herself, then Dale had nothing to say about the matter.

“***, *****...”

“**...”

However, while he didn't let it show on his face, Dale broke out in a bit of a sweat when he heard the words the ladies-in-waiting secretly exchanged.

“Is that a human custom?”

Seems like some strange misunderstandings have started to spread...

Dale was only able to pick up intermittent bits of devil language, but he knew the ladies-in-waiting had such doubts, so he understood the gist of what they were saying. However, he couldn't speak well enough to refute the claim.

I... should learn the devil language, too...

In the hopes of defusing the awkwardness of the situation, Dale set a future goal for himself.

Latina's “experiment” proceeded day by day, drawing no shortage of attention.

The containers changed from making the occasional *squish* sound to being bound airtight with cords wrapped around the lids.

Has it gone rotten...?

Dale couldn't help but find it strange and unnerving. He couldn't imagine this having anything to do with food.

Latina took one of the containers in hand while Dale watched. With a look of excitement, she carefully and gently opened the lid.

"Gah!"

"Wah!"

It had gone bad.

Latina hurriedly put the lid back on, then fluttered the hem of her clothing to try and chase the offensive odor from the room.

Well, that's no surprise.

Dale had been prepared for that to a degree, so he paid it no mind and instead lent Latina a hand.

"Was the temperature too high...?" Latina thought out loud, tilting her head. "I kept the others at somewhat lower temperatures, so things should still be fine," she muttered, her mood recovering as she moved to open the second container. After a short while, though, her shoulders drooped in disappointment.

"Mold..." she muttered. Apparently, it had grown moldy.

Even so, she didn't grow discouraged as she reached for the next container. After opening the lid she carefully observed the contents, giving it a sniff to check the smell. She moved away for a second to think, and then sniffed once more.

"I did it!" Latina soon cried out joyfully.

"I did it, Dale! I did it!"

"R-right..."

"Yay!"

Dale had no idea whatsoever what had Latina so overjoyed. Latina checked the remaining containers, giving a little “hooray!” each time. And then Latina, in unusually high spirits, caught hold of a lady-in-waiting who had been drawing away from her.

“*****”

Latina had a look on her face that said she was giving an order by way of Chrysos’s authority. At times like this, she seemed to show a bit of natural-born leadership, Dale thought.

The lady-in-waiting repeatedly nodded her head, showing her intention to abide by the order. Latina’s forcefulness was causing the poor woman to visibly flinch, and Dale couldn’t help feeling a bit of sympathy for her.

Latina had the lady-in-waiting take the extra containers that she couldn’t hold so she could run at full speed to the kitchen.

After seeing her off, Dale gave a sigh. However, he found this an encouraging sign that Latina was back to her old self.

As she ran to the kitchen, Latina thought of her friend back in Kreuz and teared up.

“Thank you, Marcel... thank you...!”

She had thoroughly evened out the texture of her chosen flour in advance. She didn’t even have a sieve, so she had to first search for something that could serve as a substitute, but she had plenty of time.

“First, I have to mix this with the flour... then I have to make the leaven... but if it goes well...”

Latina was truly grateful that she had been able to receive thorough guidance from a professional in the field, even if it had just been for a short time. That careful direction had allowed her to make her own bread.

“I can eat bread...!”

This whole chain of bizarre events really was just linked to her appetite, as Dale had expected.

While it was only for a short period of time, Latina had once worked in the

bakery that was her childhood friend's home. Rather than payment, she had asked to learn how to make bread. That didn't include just the more eye-catching processes of shaping and baking, but also how to create the bread dough, starting from the yeast, which was the foundation for bread. Her master Kenneth had made sure to impress upon her how absolutely crucial the initial preparations were to the process.

It was relatively easy to create yeast from fruit and water. As a result, her friend's father, the bakery owner, had given Latina a chance to make some herself. Latina hadn't been able to make bread since then, so she didn't have much confidence. However her firsthand experience was of significant help, allowing her to follow the process from memory and create something suitable.

Above all else, she would manage to recreate that staple food. That was Latina's dearest wish at the moment.

She combined the fruit yeast with the flour, and then waited for it to ferment further.

This could take a number of days depending on how things went, but she couldn't risk ruining things by rushing the process.

"I hope it goes well..."

Since Latina excelled at delicate mana control, using magic to carefully maintain the temperature wasn't difficult for her. Even so, she remained rather tense and was completely absorbed in the process.

She had dedicated herself completely to the process, feeling pressured to deal with the food situation. And also, there was just too little to do each and every day, which she found tiresome.

When she saw how the leaven had expanded after several days, Latina danced a dance of joy. As always, she still had no sense of rhythm.

She sensed that its ability to ferment seemed weaker than that of the yeast she had made in Kreuz. In Vassilios, it was impossible to so much as lay an eye on the sorts of fruits that you could easily get a hold of in Kreuz. It also wasn't possible to get your hands on wheat flour in the country of devils. Having to substitute ingredients greatly lowered the success rate of cooking.

“Still, it properly expanded... It’s fermenting, so this should work out,” she muttered to herself while mixing the flour and leaven. In order to strengthen the weak fermentation she added honey, and then some salt as she recalled the recipe.

“Hmm, hmm♪ Hmmm♪” she hummed while mixing.

Latina found the sensation of the sticky ingredients settling together as she mixed enjoyable, so she had started to hum without even thinking about it.

She kneaded the mixed dough smoothly into a round shape in order to prevent the gas from the fermentation process from escaping. While carefully following the instructions she had once received, she placed a damp cloth atop the dough so that it wouldn’t dry out. The temperature was naturally high in Vassilios, and that applied to room temperatures as well, so Latina decided to keep an eye on it.

In the meantime, she pulled out a thick pot she had set her eyes on in order to polish it. From the faces they were making, the servants working in the kitchen didn’t know how to deal with Latina’s actions, but the girl carried on, acting as if she hadn’t even noticed.

“I suppose it wouldn’t be possible to make an oven first...”

Latina talked to herself rather frequently, because the ladies-in-waiting and servants treated her like a princess, never talking to her in an informal manner. Her old friends Sylvia and Rose were busy, so she couldn’t hang out with them around the clock in order to stave off her boredom. The number of conversation partners Latina had at present was rather limited.

If an oven really were necessary, then it might not have been impossible to construct one if she asked Dale, since he also didn’t have any proper work at the moment. But unfortunately, Latina didn’t know the details of an oven’s design.

As a result, she took the dough that had grown splendidly — thanks to fermentation — and split it into several equal parts without any complex molding, instead simply rounding out each one. She then placed them in a pot, spaced equally.

“I put on the lid... and then I have to let it bake carefully...” Latina muttered to herself, her brows wrinkling as she did so.

The kitchens of Vassilios differed quite a bit from the Labandese ones Latina was familiar with. It didn’t just lack the magical devices which were common in Laband, but it also didn’t even have a proper stove.

As far as food preparation in Vassilios went, those with Fire affinity would heat things up to cook them, while those with Water affinity would fill jugs up to the brim, with labor being divided based on magical affinities. Which is to say, people weren’t primarily assigned here to the kitchen because of their cooking skill, but rather because they possessed Fire affinity.

The townsfolk of Vassilios didn’t cook in their own homes, with the custom being to instead eat foodstuffs that were produced in advance. That was also influenced by the environment of the land. There weren’t any nearby forests or woodlands, so they were lacking in the sort of firewood that the human race employed. The simplest, most stable source of fuel in Vassilios was mana.

Lacking Fire affinity, Latina was unable to start cooking with heat.

“Hmm...” Latina thought to herself. The other day when she made the pseudo-crepes, she had grabbed a servant, leaving them no room to argue. But this time, she wanted to simmer it carefully over a low heat. It would be a bit much to tie up a stranger for such a long period of time.

“In that case... yeah.”

However, Latina wouldn’t give up so easily today.

With her footsteps pitter-pattering, she left the kitchen, looking for that faithful pup. As a race, the mythical beasts known as soaring wolves possessed the three affinities of Holy, Wind, and Fire magic.

Back in the Dancing Ocelot, Latina had firmly held the stance that Vint wasn’t allowed to play in the kitchen, but she was no longer concerned with keeping up appearances.

“Vint, can you do it?” Latina asked the faithful pup in the kitchen.

“Hmm...” Vint replied, lacking his usual confidence.

“My child is not especially skilled at manipulating Fire magic,” Hagel interjected, offering a lifeboat to the unusually hesitant pup.

“Is that so?”

“If Wind magic, would be fine.”

“He has no such issues when it comes to Wind magic, but he has difficulty with fine control when it comes to Fire magic.”

“Can make go boom.”

“That would be bad...” Latina said with a troubled look on her face.

“Shall I undertake the task?” Hagel nonchalantly offered. The tails of both father and son wagged along all the while.

“Thank you.”

Seeing Latina’s smile they expected that they’d get plenty of petting, causing the wagging to grow even more pronounced. No matter how you looked at Hagel, he looked like a dog waiting to be praised. He displayed none of the dignity one would expect of a being with the rare power required to stand up to legendary dragons.

And so, though it was highly unusual, a mythical beast ended up baking Latina’s carefully prepared bread.

Opening the lid, Latina saw the well-cooked bread and gave a sigh of relief. Just a moment later, the warm steam and fragrant aroma reached her. She was feeling impatient, but she moved her face back just a little.

Because she hadn’t used wheat, the aroma was different than she had expected. But even so, it seemed to have gone even better than planned.

“Well, for now I need to do a taste test...”

She pulled out the piping hot bread, taking care not to get burned. It was a little too hard to pull apart by hand, so she cut off a single slice with a knife and then brought it to her mouth.

“Hmm...”

She chewed.

It was an even more doughy and heavy bread than she had expected. She also couldn't smell the scent of yeast about it, which felt a little strange.

Next up, she smeared the butter she received from Sylvia on it, going a little on the heavy side. It melted in an instant atop the hot bread, and then was absorbed.

Biting into it again, she found that the light sweetness of the bread had been improved by the flavor and saltiness of the butter. Considering she had improvised the recipe with what was on hand, she gave her own work passing marks.

"It's... bread...!"

The tears started to flow. She keenly felt the importance of staple foods.

"But the flour I used was different... so it may be that if it cools off, it'll grow hard and become inedible."

Once she had that thought, Latina was no longer able to simply sit still. Holding the freshly baked bread, she ran off to Dale. At the same time, she dispatched the faithful pup to her friend, to call for her.

That chain of actions from Latina couldn't have been called anything but eccentric from the point of view of the servants.

This is a digression, but afterwards, a trend of humming a strange melody became common amongst the devil servants, who referred to it as "human culture." The source of it was obvious. But when Dale heard the tune, his first thought was, *So there's no issue with Latina... devils just have a strange sense of rhythm...?* It was an incredibly rude misunderstanding, and he had already completely forgotten about the devil musician they had once met in a port town.

The bread filling the pot disappeared even quicker than expected.

They all became lost in feeling that nostalgic sensation, as the everyday occurrence of chewing upon that staple food had stopped being a given.

"This is amazing, Latina... you really made it..."

"Bread is so delicious..."

“It really has been a while, hasn’t it, eating something like this...?”

“How about making sandwiches?”

“There isn’t anything... to put in them...”

“I get the feeling that it would’ve been easier for me to just hunt something so we could have something decent to eat...”

With just butter and honey, it made for more than a proper enough meal. It was no exaggeration to say that it made her remember her everyday meals.

Because she was in such a daze, Latina didn’t realize at the moment the big mistake that she had made. Once her belly was full, though, her attention at last turned to that matter.

“I used up all the yeast!”

The leaven was similarly all gone.

In order to make bread again, she would need to repeat the same process from the start. Even if it had gone well once, there was no guarantee that it would go the same way when she restarted.

Sure enough, that was enough to get even Latina visibly down. Even at best, it would be several days before she could eat bread again.

“...let’s return to Kreuz...”

That was the instant that Latina first seriously voiced her desire to go home.

†

Kenneth looked at Latina with an awkward expression, having heard that story.

She was once more engrossed in spreading jam atop the bread. Seeing her so fixated on the jam brought to mind more heartrending pity than mere sympathy at the fact that a sweet tooth like Latina had been forcefully cut off from sweetness. The reason that Latina had gained such a sweet tooth in the first place was because Kenneth had tried to keep coming up with creative and original desserts every day, seeing how much they had delighted the young girl.

Kenneth was soft on the girl in terms of everything but work, so he

temporarily turned his back to the two of them, whipped up a dish in a hurry, and then placed it before Latina.

“Woooooow!” Latina cried out even more joyfully than he had expected.

Such omelets, made with fresh eggs, milk, and plenty of butter to make them nice and fluffy, were a favorite of hers.

“It’s good... eggs are just so tasty...”

“I’m glad.”

Dale had a look of great satisfaction on his face while watching Latina happily stuff her cheeks with the omelet. It was a truly heartwarming, tranquil sight.

But in reality, these two were the sister of a foreign country’s ruler (though that may not have been widely known yet) and a world-renowned hero.

The food on the table those two joyfully ate was incredibly ordinary. There weren’t any rare delicacies from the mountains or the sea, as it was just food from a bar on the outskirts of town.

Kenneth was so moved by seeing food he had created bring such joy to others that he felt tears come to his eyes.

As a bit of consideration from Kenneth, from that day on, there was sure to be a favorite of Latina and Dale’s laid out on the dinner table in the Ocelot.

2: Sequel: The Little Adorable Waitress and the Pup and the Pup and the Pup

“Yes, I suppose it is about time that I return home for a while,” Hagel said one day, several weeks after Dale and Latina had returned to Kreuz and their everyday lives, as he slowly lifted up his massive frame.

“Really?” Latina asked, tilting her head, only for Hagel to nod back.

“I have now experienced this ‘city living’ of the races of man, which I had always wanted to do at least once.”

Dale thought that it was thanks to the influence of his grandmother back in his home village that a rare mythical beast like Hagel knew such down-to-earth terms. He also felt it was unusual for mythical beasts to be going out on something resembling a “vacation.”

“So you’re heading back? It’ll really feel lonely around here, then.”

“It was pretty fun drinking with you, after all.”

Those reactions had come from the old-timers who made up the regulars of the Ocelot. At some point, the mythical beast had become a drinking buddy for some of them. It was hard to tell what was more worthy of comment: how unprecedented the situation was, or how open-minded the old-timers were.

The world was vast, but surely there were no other stories out there of a mythical beast settling down in a bar.

With slightly cloudy eyes, Dale looked at his “big bro” Kenneth. The man had been watching his beloved daughter wander about, only to then look back at his “little bro” with an astounded gaze.

“Apparently, your grandmother introduced him to booze.”

“That damn hag...!”

Sure enough, Dale’s grandmother Wendelgard had been the culprit.

“Hey, watch your mouth around Emma.”

Dale didn't say a word about the fact that Kenneth had gone completely soft in regards to his daughter. That was because he knew to do so would result in every person in the shop unanimously stating, “you're the one person who has no room to talk.”

“Latina grew up to be such a good kid, even though she was by my side.”

“I think that's more proof of how much Latina's real parents had their acts together,” Kenneth bluntly responded, and then he scooped Emma up. Dale was aware that Kenneth, who was wondering whether he'd prefer a boy or a girl for their third child, had recently restarted his training that he had neglected after retiring from active duty.

It may have been in the form of her “master,” but Kenneth had watched over Latina's growth as one of her guardians, seeing in the process just how quickly girls came of age.

Emma was so small right now, but she would surely mature into an adult shockingly fast, too. Kenneth devoted himself to his training, for when “that day” came.

Dale thought quite a bit on Kenneth and the state he found himself in.

He doesn't have much room to talk about me...

By the way, Kenneth felt the need to teach his daughter combat techniques and how to defend herself to a greater degree than he did for his son. Dale would helpfully agree to the plan, and so Kenneth's children would become skilled enough to hold their own against a reasonably accomplished adventurer, but it would still be some time before that came to pass.

Everyone, the regulars included, turned a blind eye to the fact that this single bar in town possessed such an excess of military might that they would even surpass an army.

With the air of old friends of many years about them, Hagel and the regulars talked away, as if loathing to part.

“It was a daily occurrence, seeing some rookie get shocked upon seeing you,

and afterwards be creeping about and ready to flee.”

Would that not be a fine example of interfering with business?

“If that’s all it takes to make them weak in the knees, they’d be of no use on the battlefield anyway.”

“That’s for sure. Well, anyone with even half a backbone went off to the relay point to Vassilios, so I suppose there’s no helping it.”

The giant beast was in the midst of those loudly guffawing old-timers as if it was only natural.

“...Wouldn’t it be more concerning to have someone not find him at all out of place?”

“It’s a little late to be saying stuff like that!”

“By the way, who’s picking up Hagel’s tab?”

“Latina will be handling it. She said it was her responsibility to pay for his food.”

Dale thought on how nobody commented that normally the food for a “pet dog” wouldn’t include alcohol.

It was then that, with Dale watching, Latina tilted her head and asked, “It’s just Hagel? What will Vint do?” bringing up the name of the other “pet dog,” who was currently playing with the owner’s son, Theo, in the backyard. Hagel once more gave a nod and said, “I shall return with him by my side, at least for the time being. I believe my mate should also wish to see how he is doing.”

“Mate?” Latina questioned, tilting her head at the bit of unfamiliar vocabulary.

“Little Lady, he means his wife,” one of the regulars explained.

“Hagel’s wife... so Vint’s mother, you mean?”

“Indeed.”

Dale wondered why nobody commented on the fact that mythical beasts forming spousal relationships was being treated as completely natural. Why was it that even though they were both members of the seven races, the

people of Vassilios didn't understand the custom of marriage, but these pups did?

Dale felt like he had just caught a glimpse of the gulf in understanding between different cultures.

"Maybe you should ask him for the secret to spousal harmony, eh, little lady?"

Latina's cheeks tinged a little red in response to the regular's words. Seeing Latina act so bashfully, the people around her broke out in teasing laughter.

As if she'd ask an animal something like that, Dale thought to himself, but it was already too late.

"Males cannot form a society on their own. Treating females with proper respect is the secret to achieving harmony for the entire pack."

"You really have it rough too, don't you?"

The old-timers poured a bottle of booze into the colored plate before Hagel, urging him to keep drinking. Dale realized a little too late that that colored plate, which wasn't normally used in the Ocelot, served as Hagel's personal drinking cup, and was no longer able to hold himself back from making a comment...

"That's the truth."

"Sure is, right?"

...or he was about to do so, but when his senior in terms of the married lifestyle, Kenneth, voiced his agreement with a serious look on his face, Dale swallowed his words. Apparently, the world's spouses were hiding all manner of hardships of which someone like Dale remained unaware. He had only just had his fill of a sweet engagement period, after all.

And then, the coming day, Hagel spread his wings wide in the backyard of the Dancing Ocelot. With a heavy thud from the flap of his massive wings, he left behind some brief words of farewell to those present, "Well then, may we meet again."

Not even waiting for a reply, Hagel took off into the air in the next instant.

Without any hesitation, he changed direction to face Tislow, and they saw his silhouette take off towards the east.

Vint looked like he was about to take off after his father, but first turned around and rubbed his head up against Latina, wagging his tail all the while.

“Leaving now.”

“Take care, Vint. And give my regards to your mother, alright?”

After Latina said that, Vint trotted off towards the southern gate on the outskirts of town.

Later on, Dale was seriously chewed out by a guardsman as Vint’s “owner.”

Since the official position was more or less that he was a “dog,” it would be a serious issue if he were to suddenly and carelessly take off in the middle of town. Owing to that and the fact that he often used the forest south of Kreuz as a playground, Vint had grown skilled at passing through the southern gate at all times of day. It had reached the point where the gatekeeper stationed there simply let him pass without question.

Normally, there was a toll for entering Kreuz. When Dale questioned the gatekeeper about the matter, however, he simply asked with a straight face, “Would *you* take money from a dog?” Dale was left feeling strangely unsatisfied with his answer.

And then, after less than a week back home, Vint returned to Kreuz.

Moving to the beat of his own drum, as always, Vint trotted into the Dancing Ocelot, walked straight up to Latina with his tail wagging, and reported his return.

“Back home!”

“Welcome home, V...int...?” Dale heard Latina’s voice skip a beat as it trailed off into a question, drawing his gaze in the direction of her and Vint. At a glance, the soaring wolf wagging his tail near the entrance to the Ocelot looked the same as always. He still had on the poncho that Latina had made for him to conceal his wings when he was out about town, which had become his trademark. It had gotten a bit dirty from his journey.

Dale soon got a clear look, however, at what his initial glance had left him feeling was out of place.

The poncho Vint had on was squirming about. Even Dale couldn't stop himself from shooting up a bit in surprise.

"What is that?"

"What's going on?"

"Were born," Vint said, giving a response that was difficult to understand. Before Dale and Latina could ask for clarification, though, three furballs rolled on out.

"Said want to come, so no helping it."

He said there was "no helping it," but that didn't look at all accurate to Vint's feelings. He really did move to the beat of his own drum, as always.

Looking closely at the furballs, they appeared to be puppies with wings.

"Brought along," the mythical beast said with an embarrassed laugh and then stuck out his tongue. Two of the furballs were the same color as Vint, while the other had black fur. They all tilted their heads a bit in the same manner.

As Dale sat there dumbfounded for a moment, the three furballs sounded off in high voices, "Urf." "Urf." Woof."

Then with a strangely satisfied look on his face, Dale gave a single nod.

"Unlike Vint, they can give a proper dog-like bark."

"Woof!"

"Yours just sounds fake."

While Dale and Vint were having that exchange, the three furballs all headed toward Latina unnoticed. They circled around her while crying out in their sweet little voices all the while, and tried to climb up into her lap.

"Wah..."

As an animal lover, Latina completely lost any urge to remark on the current situation, instead bending her legs and scooping up all three furballs at once. Latina grinned widely when the pups in her arms happily licked at her cheeks.

Though she was enjoying it, she found just hugging to not be enough, so she lowered them down atop her knees and started petting them over and over. The furballs seemed to take great pleasure in that, their eyes happily narrowing and showing their fluffy bellies.

“...What should I do, Dale? These puppies are just too cute!”

“Ah, so you finally came back to us.”

It had taken a while for Latina to return from being completely engrossed in the furballs, forgetting everything else going on around her.

Since doting on Latina was Dale’s singular focus, he simply sat there quietly and let her be.

“Vint, what’s the deal with these puppies?”

Judging from the wings, he presumed they were soaring wolf puppies. However, they were far too young to speak the languages of man.

“Little brother, sister, brother.”

“They’re your siblings, Vint?”

Now that he mentioned it, two of the puppies did have grey fur that closely resembled Vint’s. However, they were quite a bit fluffier than their older brother.

Nobody had any trouble whatsoever calling them “dogs.” The standards for what qualified as a dog had become rather out of whack for the Ocelot.

“Were born at some point.”

“Is that how it went?”

“Daddy surprised too.”

“Ah... So they were born when he was wandering the world with me?”

The journey to wipe out the demon lords was already becoming a matter of the past to Dale, and had gained the nuance of being like a round-the-world trip. The hero’s brutal deeds made sure that the murdered demon lords would be turning in their graves over that thought, though.

“What’s Hagel up to, now that you mention him?” Dale asked, realizing that

Vint had returned alone.

“Being lovey-dovey with Mommy,” Vint responded indifferently. He didn’t hold back when it came to his father. “May end up with more.”

“Arf.” “Arf.” “Arf.”

From the way that the puppies all responded in the same manner, it would seem that they understood human language. And apparently they also felt the same way about the relationship between Hagel and his wife.

“Well... when he came along with me, he said he’d already retired as head of the pack.”

“Really?”

“So he must have time on his paws now.”

Apparently Hagel was busy enjoying his retirement. Dale could sense something akin to Vint’s whimsical nature in his father’s actions.

“Daddy and Mommy, lovey-dovey alone time.”

Dale was suddenly struck by the strange additions made to the pup’s vocabulary during his long stay at the Ocelot.

Meanwhile, Latina was completely absorbed in the adorableness of the puppies, and Dale was busy being his deplorable self, so they didn’t notice, but...

Soon afterwards, the Ocelot became the site of an emergency meeting of the regulars.

“Kenneth, to start with, shut the door!”

“Sorry, Rita, but please close up shop temporarily, and restrict normal customers from coming in.”

“I suppose there’s no helping it. Theo, take Emma and head up to the second floor. And make sure you keep a proper eye on her!”

“We dispatched someone to the guard station. The captain should be here soon.”

Latina had a look of confusion on her face at the commotion going on around

her, but kept doting on the furballs all the while. Meanwhile, the circuits in Dale's brain seemed to finally click back into place, and he at last reacted. He had apparently been in quite the deplorable state, for it to have overcome his reactions as a serious hero.

"...Isn't this really bad?"

"Woof?"

"They may not have any combat ability, but these pups are still mythical beasts, right? There will be people with plenty of gold and eccentric tastes who'll want them, and also craftsmen who want to get their hands on materials from mythical beasts, right?"

"Ah..."

It was apparently then that Latina at last recalled that her "pet dog" was a rare being known as a mythical beast. Meanwhile, Vint's younger siblings that Latina was holding were playfully nibbling at her fingertips. No matter how one looked at it, they were just little furballs who were utterly harmless.

"With that said, if something were to happen to these pups, then the soaring wolves from back in the village would come for revenge, wouldn't they?" Kenneth asked, causing Latina to shoot Vint a troubled look.

That had become an issue when Vint came to Kreuz, too. For beings that could travel through the sky like soaring wolves, Kreuz wasn't an especially far off place. And it was impossible to deny the possibility that a pack of furious mythical beasts would descend upon Kreuz if anything were to happen to the puppies, as they possessed a strong sense of camaraderie.

Vint may have still been a pup himself, but he was capable of showing discretion. And when it came to Hagel, it would be flat-out ridiculous to worry about him. But it was a different story when it came to these furballs.

Despite Latina pointing a troubled look his way, Vint seemed to feel no sense of responsibility and just kept scratching his neck with his hind leg.

The heated discussion continued on for a while, until finally reaching a conclusion that made everyone give a collective sigh.

“Well... y’know...”

“That’d be safest, right?”

“And he *does* have the most free times on his hands.”

The members involved in the meeting all turned and looked at Dale as they said such self-serving things. Dale hadn’t participated in the discussion and paid no attention to those gazes, instead watching Latina tire herself out playing with the furballs. Jealous of his younger siblings, Vint pushed aside the furballs curled up atop Latina with his front paw, and then placed his head atop her knees. His mood seemed to turn around when Latina petted his head with a strained smile, causing him to happily wag his tail.

The puppies who were shoved aside by Vint didn’t seem to let that get them down, as two of them circled around their big brother to get back to Latina, while the other climbed atop his back and looked at her with big round, cute eyes.

“So cute!” (Dale thought about Latina frolicking with animals.)

“They really are adorable,” responded Latina with a smile, not knowing what Dale had just muttered to himself mentally. While squinting his eyes a bit, Dale called out to Vint, “Vint, you said these pups ‘wanted to come,’ so their objective was...”

“Latina, of course.”

“Sure enough...”

Apparently her petting skill was already legendary amongst the soaring wolves.

“Daddy’s slick fur, really popular.”

“Because of Latina’s brushing, huh...?”

“All lovey-dovey with Mommy. Probably get more.”

“Arf.” “Arf.” “Arf.”

Apparently the puppies were also fond of the idea of getting even more siblings.

“So they get along, huh?”

“Lovey-dovey!”

It seemed that Latina really was loved by canines. The puppies showed no hint of budging so much as an inch from Latina’s side, and Vint looked at his siblings’ actions as if they were only natural.

It was then that Dale finally noticed the gazes fixated on him.

“...What is it?”

“Well, those pups’ objective is Latina, right?”

“So it seems,” Dale said with a nod in response to Kenneth, who was acting as representative for the group.

“In that case, they’ll spend most of their time near her, yeah?”

“I suppose so...”

“So the obvious conclusion we reached is that you should be responsible for the pups.”

“Huh?” Dale questioned, the gazes coming from around him all turning lukewarm.

“You haven’t been leaving Latina’s side at all lately, yeah?”

“Yeah, and you’ve had your eyes fixed on the little lady’s rear.”

“I’ve been looking at more than just her butt!” Dale retorted, picking a strange point to fix his rebuttal on.

“You must be overjoyed, having a good reason not to leave Latina’s side,” Rita said. Dale had reached his most deplorable of states, reacting like he wasn’t entirely dissatisfied with the idea.

“And besides, you have the greatest authority of anyone here. And in terms of strength, well... anyone who’d try to lay a hand on you would have to be a real idiot.”

“And so, you’re the best possible guardian for the pups.”

Currently, as the patriotic savior of the nation, the world-famous Platinum

Hero, his voice would be even more influential than that of Kreuz's ruler, Count Kleinmifel.

He was a great warrior who had defeated numerous demon lords, like a figure from some epic tale. Add the fact that he had become an extraordinarily powerful demon, and there were now none who could possibly defeat him if he employed his full power.

"Vint, you weren't intending for us to raise the puppies here, right?"

Now that he'd had the responsibility thrust onto him, Dale was having an exchange that was like a parent telling their child, "I don't care where you found them! We can't keep them here!" However, since the other party he was addressing was himself a "dog," it made for a pretty surreal sight.

"When Daddy and Mommy alone time over, take back."

"Hmm? So it's more like you just brought them along for a play date?" Dale said, looking a little relieved.

"Arf." "Urf." Woof." The puppies sounded off in their sweet voices, surrounding Dale as their tails wagged.

"So after a bit of time has passed, you'll be taking them back?"

"Yeah."

Imitating Vint, the puppies let out a *sniff, sniff* together. He may not have had it as bad as Latina, but Dale also found their poofy fur and big round eyes plenty adorable.

It wasn't exactly as if Dale was an animal-hater. Back in his home village, it was normal to be accompanied by a hound when hunting, and whenever puppies were born, he would go along with his younger brother to go see them.

If it's just for a bit, then it'll be fine, Dale thought to himself. Looking at him, Latina had a realization. *They really are Vint's siblings...*

Latina realized that the puppies had cleverly employed their cuteness in a calculated manner. However, rather than taking that as scheming or something done out of ill will, she saw it as them being good at adapting to the situation, like Vint was.

Well, they're cute, so I suppose it's fine.

And above all else, Latina was unable to overcome the allure of their fluffiness.

Latina wasn't the only one with an expression of joy on her face over the sudden visit from the fluffy pups. Emma had been allowed back downstairs with the conclusion of the emergency meeting in the Ocelot, and the second she saw those stuffed animal-looking furballs, she let out a squeal of delight.

"Ooh!"

The puppies realized that Emma was fond of them, and wagged their tails while letting out sweet little sounds of their own.

Vint had been staying at the Ocelot since before Emma was born. However, he mostly played with Theo. Theo's athletic abilities were exceptional because he had a mythical beast as his playmate since he was little, so even a simple game of tag was on a level where the young Emma couldn't possibly join in. Furthermore, Latina had gone missing back when Emma was just a baby, before she was old enough to understand what was going on. At that time Vint was making frequent trips between Vassilios and Kreuz, so his time in the Ocelot was limited. The time that Emma was able to spend with him hadn't been long at all.

For Emma, ever since she'd been born it had been "normal" to live with a pup (soaring wolf) around, but Vint was more like her big brother's personal pet dog.

And also, Emma was still a little shy around Latina, as the girl had only just recently returned to the Ocelot. Even if she was told they had lived together back when she was a baby, she had no memory of that, so to Emma she was essentially a stranger she had met for the first time just the other day. To her older brother Theo, Latina was his "beloved big sis," so ever since she returned, he had fawned on her like a little brother like it was only natural. That had been a shock for Emma, too.

Emma truly was interested in this kind, beautiful "big sister." However, she didn't know how to deal with the distance between them.

It was then that the fluffy little furballs had appeared.

The puppies also seemed to be fond of Emma, wagging their tails at her, but the one they were most attached to was Latina, sure enough. If the young girl wanted to play with them, she would need to approach Latina. And Emma also knew that Latina was fond of children and good at dealing with them, so she would look after Emma if she took the initiative. However, Dale was always clinging to Latina, so that also meant getting close to him.

By nature, Dale was also fond of children, and he didn't have any real trouble looking after them. If Emma was nearby, he'd watch out for her second only to Latina.

Emma's doting father, Kenneth, was also aware that Dale would never do anything to harm his beloved child. Dale cared for Latina above all else, so he would never lay a hand on somebody else's daughter, even after Kenneth's precious little girl matured. He was someone perfectly safe and secure for Emma to be around.

Since he was worrying about such things as he stood there on the stairs, Kenneth really had no room to talk about Dale being a "doting idiot."

The number of furballs roaming around the Ocelot had increased, but Latina's day to day life didn't change all that much. She cleaned the Ocelot alongside Kenneth, and then diligently carried out her work in the kitchen. She never played with Vint while working there. The puppies followed Latina about when she was in the middle of cleaning, but when they tried to chase after her as she returned to the kitchen, they found their path obstructed by their elder brother, playing the part of a faithful hound.

To Emma, such times were a chance for her to monopolize the puppies. She squatted next to Vint and went around petting the puppies. Seeing that adorable little poster girl for the restaurant enjoy herself so greatly, the regulars couldn't help but break out in wide grins.



Latina hadn't actually forbidden the pups from entering the kitchen. The stairs were in the rear of the kitchen, and especially in winter, Vint would often go up to Dale and Latina's room in the attic to rest. And the quickest route to Theo and Vint's favorite place to play, the backyard, was to cut through the kitchen. It was also very convenient for the adults to have Emma and the puppies play in the backyard, since that made it easy to watch over them.

When Latina went on her break, she rolled up an old cloth in order to make an impromptu ball. Latina beckoned Emma and the furballs to stop playing in the shop and come out into the backyard. Next, she showed the ball to the puppies and then threw it. The furballs all took off at once, looking as if they were almost rolling along. The gray-furred male puppy was the first to reach the ball. However, before he could pick it up in his mouth, the gray-furred female and black-furred male caught up. As a result, it ended up in a scuffle to grab the ball.

The black-furred puppy was the one who successfully got it, skillfully catching hold of an opening. He then ran at full speed to carry it back to Latina, then obediently dropped it in front of her while wearing a look on his face that said he wanted to be praised.

Latina petted the puppies and then handed the ball over to Emma, who had been watching with twinkling eyes.

Emma threw the ball with all her might, but it fell just a few paces away. However, the pups still had fiery gazes in their eyes and took off after it.

Seeing Emma giggle at the puppies' antics, Latina broke out in a gentle smile.

The puppies obediently delivered the ball to Emma as well, but apparently had hit upon the idea of stealing it back before she could throw it. Emma started running with the ball so it couldn't be stolen, resulting in the toddler and the puppies all frolicking about together.

And unsurprisingly, before long this ended with the toddler taking a splendid spill. At first, Emma wore an expression like she didn't even know what had happened. She looked more surprised than in pain, but after looking down at her muddy, scraped up knees, she seemed ready to burst out into tears. Emma had just noticed the pain a little late to start crying right away, but Latina

hurried over and scooped up the girl, hugging her tight to console her and said, “You did real good, Emma, not crying.”

Hearing Latina’s kind voice, Emma managed to pull herself back from the verge of tears. Recognizing how hard the young girl was trying, Latina patted her on the head and praised her further.

Latina skillfully wiped away the dirt from Emma’s skirt, and then cleaned her knee at the water station behind the kitchen. She checked the wound, and then lightly applied some salve that she had at the ready. There was a reason that Latina didn’t magically heal Emma’s injury, despite being able to use healing magic. If it were particularly serious, or something life-threatening that required immediate action, Latina wouldn’t hesitate to employ it, but it would be incredibly dangerous to give the young Emma the impression that injuries are something that can be easily healed.

Dale had been fairly clear on the matter to Latina once Theo was born. That had also been a necessary measure back in his home village, a unique environment where there were many people about who could use healing magic. Latina worried about Theo as he spent everyday running and jumping about and getting all scratched up. But after seeing him grow up to into a strong-willed young man, she realized that being overprotective would be harmful to her precious “younger siblings.”

Latina was able to calmly handle Emma precisely because she had such experience.

“Alright, all better now. It didn’t sting, did it?”

Emma nodded her head, and Latina broke out in a gentle smile.

“I’m so proud of you, Emma. You really gave your best, didn’t you?”

The whole time that Latina was treating Emma’s wound, the furballs were excitedly running around them, wagging their tails and winding about Latina’s legs as if saying, “pay attention to us!” Even though she saw their adorable antics, right now her priority was the already-in-progress action of praising Emma. Understanding that, Emma let her “big sister” dote on her, which she hadn’t been able to bring herself to do until now.

“Big si—”

However, she felt too embarrassed to say those words she wasn't accustomed to, and instead simply hugged Latina tight.

Dale had watched over this whole chain of events, having plunked himself down by the kitchen door. Since Latina wouldn't pay attention to him, the gray-furred male puppy came running over to Dale instead. He showed off his poofy fur, making a face as if to say, “you may go ahead and pet me.”

Dale scooped the pup up and rubbed his tummy. Even though he bared his fangs in displeasure, Dale paid that matter no heed.

Latina really does seem like she'd make a good mother, Dale thought to himself and then broke out in a wide, sloppy grin. He was in the sort of deplorable state that shouldn't be exposed to others.

†

Not even a month had passed before it was time for the furballs to return home.

The first ones to realize the situation were the members of the guard corps tasked with keeping the peace in Kreuz. The reason that Count Kleinmifel, the ruler of Kreuz, prepared a guard corps despite such things being unheard of in most other domains was because there were so many powerful adventurers in Kreuz. The adventurers themselves had their own unspoken rules and a self-governing organization, but things couldn't simply be left to that. As such, an organization specifically tasked with keeping peace in the town was a needed. Since their duties were related, the gatekeepers of the town were also counted as members of the guard corps. The other counts would hire personal soldiers to guard their manors and towns from outside enemies, but the guard corps instead primarily concerned themselves with the town's residents. As such, the guardsmen were a different sort of organization than those soldiers who stood atop the walls of the town, patrolling and keeping an eye on the outside. However, they served the same lord and their garrisons were close to one another, so it wasn't as if they didn't interact.

It was in that manner that the captain of the guardsmen learned that countless figures were approaching Kreuz. At first the guards had only half-

listened to the information, not thinking on it deeply. It wasn't rare at all to see flocks of birds or flying magical beasts moving as a group, after all.

Eventually, though, the captain realized a certain fact that caused him to break out in a cold sweat over his entire body. He immediately dispatched a subordinate to the Ocelot and constructed an emergency task force.

By the time he arrived at the Ocelot, the key members had already gathered, and Vint was seated quietly in the middle of them. His siblings with their matching fur colors were seated in the same posture, gazing at the people around them. They may have been thinking this was some sort of game.

Vint gave an embarrassed laugh and stuck out his tongue as everyone looked at him, and then confirmed that the situation was just as the captain had thought.

“Mommy’s scent came.”

With that one line, he had confirmed that a pack of mythical beasts had flown to Kreuz.

“...It’s only a matter of time before the troops realize what they really are.”

As they were part of a different organization, the captain couldn't exert his authority to interfere.

“I’m sure they’ll form a squad to eliminate them.”

“Yeah, that’d make sense.”

“That’d be the normal reaction, usually...”

Mythical beasts were the sort of beings that normally only ever appeared in epics and legends, so it would generally be impossible to even imagine one wanting to live as a pet dog in a bar on the outskirts of town, just to enjoy the brushing skills of one of its employees. Even with an explanation, no one aside from the regulars who had experienced it everyday would believe this confusing and bizarre fact.

“Our adventurer regulars would be able to get things under control... but not all the adventurers in Kreuz frequent our place...” Rita said with a sigh. Kenneth continued on with a similar tone to the one his wife had used, “If some

adventurers blinded by greed go for a reckless charge and are struck down in the process... well, it could even be someone with good intentions getting over eager, but that could lead to a grudge being formed.”

“Even if they *are* mythical beasts, there’s no guarantee that they’d come out of it unharmed, either...”

Adventurers normally made their living by hunting rare magical beasts. Nobody had the right to stop them from doing so. Even though the adventurers of the Dancing Ocelot possessed a great deal of clout, they wouldn’t be able to enforce such a restriction.

“We’re going to be working overtime everyday from today on...”

The thought of the cleanup he would surely be in charge of no matter how things played out made the guard captain feel dizzy and caused him to sigh.

“...What if I take the puppies and head outside of Kreuz?” Latina offered, seeing the state everyone was in. She was seated in a chair with Emma atop her knees and the black puppy atop the young girl’s lap, making for a two-tiered stack. Everyone looked up together in response to Latina’s proposal, but soon shook their heads from side to side.

“That wouldn’t do, little lady.”

“It’d only make things worse.”

“If we ended up with any more, it’d just be impossible to handle, right?”

If Latina carelessly came into contact with the soaring wolves, then there was a great chance they would be charmed by her and the number of “pups” hanging about would increase. It was easy to imagine her trying to negotiate to have them leave peacefully, only to end up having the whole pack follow her back into town.

“Looks like we’ll have to leave it up to you,” Kenneth said, patting Dale on the shoulder.

“Yeah... looks like it,” Dale consented with a sigh. He was still an acquaintance of the soaring wolves, even if he wasn’t as accepted by them as Latina.

Vint had a completely calm look on his face, only for Dale to stand up and give

him a light *thwap* on the head.

“You’re going too, of course.”

“Woof!”

And so, the members of the emergency task force in the Dancing Ocelot decided to bury the truth behind the incident as quickly as possible, sending Vint and Dale out under the veil of secrecy to do so.

There was a reason behind needing to do it “under the veil of secrecy,” too. Just as the emergency task force had feared, the patrols soon figured out the identity of those flying beasts. It had been decided that entry and exit through the gates would be largely restricted, under the pretexts of safety and the need to form a plan. But even so, Dale and the pup sneaked stealthily out of Kreuz using their usual south gate.

In that way, it was a plot being concealed with the full assistance of the guard corps.

After leaving Kreuz, Dale confirmed that the soaring wolves were already at a distance where they could be seen with the naked eye, and then looked over at Vint out of the corner of his eye.

“Vint, guide them to some place a bit removed from the town. Can you use Wind magic or something to get them to notice us?”

“Will give try.”

Vint’s Wind magic had earned his father’s seal of approval. Raising a roar alongside directing his magic, the pup managed to get the shapes in the distance to suddenly stop moving.

“They noticed... let’s move,” Dale said before taking off running at a speed far beyond what a normal human could achieve. Vint looked surprised at first, but then happily took off at full speed after him. Vint forgot their objective along the way and started enjoying it as if they were playing a game of tag. This resulted in him almost flying right into Dale when he stopped at their destination.

“You dumb mutt!”

“Woof!”

With some speedy footwork, Dale dodged Vint, then landed a light blow on his head. With that, the pup seemed to remember what was going on and started grooming himself, as if to gloss over what had just happened.

The place Dale had guided the soaring wolves to was the open clearing used as a flying dragon landing space whenever he was invited to the capital. Dale and Vint looked up at the sky and saw numerous soaring wolves descend. At their head was a slender black-furred wolf that Dale was acquainted with. Dale had previously visited the soaring wolf village to request Hagel’s assistance. At that time, he had conversed with this female wolf, Vint’s mother. She had jet black fur, and wasn’t as fluid in the languages of man as Hagel and Vint were.

Apparently she also remembered Dale. Without any hesitation, she smoothly landed right next to Dale, not even making a sound. Vint turned to face her jet-black frame and wagged his tail.

“Mommy.”

She looked at Vint and Dale with her dark reddish-brown eyes and in a high-pitched, feminine voice said, “Sorry for all the trouble my child has caused you.” Dale had heard it before, but she really did seem strangely accustomed to saying those words.

“No, he’s been no...” Dale started to respond with that old cliché, but then stopped and thought for a second. He pondered whether or not Vint had been a hassle.

He moves to the beat of his own drum, but he carries things for Latina, and plays with Theo... He’s actually been working pretty hard, now that I think of it.

He may have actually been doing quite a bit compared to watchdogs at large the world over. He really did do as he pleased a bit *too* much, though, so Dale was hesitant to praise him.

Having reached a conclusion internally, Dale faced back towards Vint’s mother. He may have not wanted to praise Vint, but he also couldn’t worry the pup’s mother, either.

“Honestly, he’s been doing a good job of carrying out all the tasks assigned to

him, so you don't need to worry."

"Not at all. He surely just causes you trouble..."

"No, that's not the case at all."

Despite being a very common sort of conversation between two guardians, it was a rather bizarre situation, as one of them was a mythical beast.

Dale caught a fleeting glimpse of Vint out of the corner of his eye, and found that the pup had a self-satisfied look about him. Dale didn't let it show on his face, but that irked him.

Several of the other soaring wolves had a look of "well, there's no helping that" about them in regards to the conversation between Dale and Vint's mother. Considering how fluent she was at apologizing, Vint must have done whatever he pleased back in their home village too.

"By the way, what is it that you came here for...?" Dale asked.

"My kids, three, gone. Searching," the mother wolf responded awkwardly.

While Dale thought on that meaning, Vint approached his mother's side with a know-it-all look about him.

"Said want come, no helping."

"Three?"

"Sad leave others behind, so no helping."

With Vint's reply, Dale arrived at the conclusion that they were likely discussing the three puppies. Applying a bit of liberal translation, what she was saying was, "Three of my children went missing, so I came in search of them."

As Dale nodded to himself in satisfaction, Vint's mother suddenly opened her mouth wide and chomped down on her son.

"Yelp!"

"Ooh, you actually sounded like a dog for once..."



Vint continued to be gnawed upon as Dale stood there choosing something unusual to be impressed over. Vint tried to escape, but his mother was easily leading him around by the nose. When she pinned him down with her front paw, Vint once more let out a pathetic yelp.

The other soaring wolves showed no signs of trying to stop this exchange between mother and son. As such, Dale didn't feel like getting involved, either. He didn't want to interfere with this bit of canine-style discipline, and though Vint was being bitten he didn't seem to be injured or bleeding. It was clear that his mother knew restraint. Even for someone from a different species like Dale, that fact was obvious.

But, well... being bit by such a big carnivore sure is a pretty rough form of discipline...

He was also in awe of the way that the mother wolf handled her movements. Despite Vint's swiftness, he was unable to do anything, left powerless to stop his punishment from continuing on. She may have been even more skilled at physical combat than Hagel.

After a short while of enduring that punishment, Vint rolled over and showed his belly to his mother. It was a pose of complete surrender.

With that, his mother stopped her attack.

Dale looked over at Vint and saw that he was tearing up. It was the same face he had made when he seriously made Latina angry and she declared she would stop brushing him. Apparently he was truly sorry.

"Um... if it's about the pu... your children, then they're in town, but... if a large number of mythical beasts descend upon a human town, it'll result in utter chaos..."

In actuality, just their flying so close had caused plenty of chaos as is.

"Understood."

"I'll come again with them tomorrow, so could I have you wait in a place removed from town?"

"My sincere apologies for repeatedly causing such trouble for you."

Dale couldn't help but wonder just what Vint had done back home to result in this vocabulary of his mother's.

After seeing Dale and Vint off, the soaring wolves took off to the other side of the mountain. Dale gave a sigh of relief, figuring if they were far enough away that they couldn't be seen, an extermination unit wouldn't be formed.

Thus, Dale successfully stopped a fight between mythical beasts and humans before it even began.

However, he had forgotten something: there was someone in the Ocelot who it would take even more time to convince than the soaring wolves.

What Dale saw when he returned to the Ocelot was Emma with her arms around the puppies, objecting with all her might. His cowardly "big bro" Kenneth was looking on and thinking, wearing an expression that said he had no intention of getting involved with his beloved daughter's protesting. It seemed he was afraid that if he took away the puppies, she would play her trump card of yelling out "I hate you, Papa!"

If her mother Rita were to yell at her, that would bring an end to the situation, but it would also result in a crying fit so fierce it would sound like the world was ending. Understanding that, and also being soft on the adorable little poster girl by nature, the regulars chose to simply watch and wait.

It seemed the most Emma's little arms could hold tight was two puppies, so the gray-furred female succeeded in squirming her way free. The puppy headed towards Latina with her tail wagging, and when Emma's attention was focused on wanting to get her back, the other two managed to slip out of her grasp. The puppies all clustered around Latina, enthusiastically wagging their tails. While watching that, Emma furrowed her little brows firmly in displeasure.

"Emma," Latina called out in a very kind, pleasant tone. That was enough for the girl to break down sobbing. Latina beckoned Emma with a smile, and then picked her up in a hug.

"No... I don't wanna...!" Emma yelled out loudly while crying.

"Right," Latina replied, just hugging and listening to the girl rather than scolding her. She stroked Emma's hair to soothe her, and waited patiently until

the girl calmed down.

“Listen, Emma...” Latina said in a gentle voice, looking Emma straight in the eyes. “Their mother came to pick these little ones up. I hear she’s really worried about them.”

“But... but...”

“I know. You understand too. You just feel sad about it, right?”

Though she kept on objecting, Emma didn’t deny Latina’s statement. The whole time, a kind smile remained on the older girl’s face.

Latina had been a very pampered child. She hadn’t been spoiled, though, as she was constantly restraining herself. But at her core, she was still a pampered child even so.

Perhaps that was just the way she was because of the great loss she had suffered when she was very young. And it may have been affected by the never-ending doting from Dale, too.

As a result, Latina was skilled when it came to doting on others.

She would gently draw close, and with great kindness and her unique soothing nature, she would support those who had been hurt. Seeing her overflowing with such concern for others, she at times seemed almost divine.

Well, if demon lords are like a type of god, then I guess feeling that she’s a “goddess” isn’t exactly wrong!

However, unsurprisingly, that fact had nothing to do with how Dale felt.

Seeing how much she had grown only made it stand out all the more how much he *hadn’t*, to such a degree that it almost felt somehow refreshing.

“Vint, you can deliver your siblings to your mother, right?” Dale called out to Vint, suddenly remembering he was there.

“Woof.”

Immediately after the scolding from his mother Vint had been acting meek, but he had since completely returned to his usual self, lazing about.

“Won’t they get homesick, or feel lonely or something...?”

The pups didn't look to be feeling that way at all in regards to their parting. That was why Dale had thought to ask, only for Vint to respond without a hint of hesitation, as always, "Just bring again, fine."

"Hey."

The pup apparently had no intention of repenting.

"They may come on own..."

Dale couldn't immediately come up with a response to that statement.

He had no idea how long it would take for these furballs to grow up enough to understand the language of man and fly on their own. However, there was no guarantee that within a few decades, there wouldn't be pups with wings wandering all about throughout Kreuz. In fact, it was actually pretty easy to imagine.

If I let Latina go play in the soaring wolf settlement... no. That'd only make things worse...

If he took Latina on frequent visits to his home village, the soaring wolves could let off steam by meeting with her in the mountains. That thought occurred to him for only an instant before he shot it down. With that the number of soaring wolves acquainted with her would only grow, and there was a chance it would cause the situation to worsen.

After failing to come up with a concrete solution, Dale looked over at Latina, who held Emma in her arms.

For now, it seemed that this incident at least closed the distance between those two in a single go.

Emma was so young that even Dale didn't feel jealous of her. Theo wore a complex expression on his face, though, having had both his "big sis" and little sister taken away from him at the same time.

Dale became lost in his own thoughts again, thinking that there was no helping the way that Theo felt.

By the way, Dale had forgotten that there was no guarantee that the furballs in question would just behave themselves and head obediently back on home.

“Arf.” “Arf.” “Arf.”

“Gah?! Stay out of there!”

They were Vint’s siblings. There was no way that things would go so easily.

“Arrf.” “Urf.” “Arf.”

“Don’t go crying like that! You make it seem like I’m doing something wrong!”

“You shouldn’t go teaching the youngsters to abuse animals.”

“Shut up, you!”

Dale and the valiantly fleeing furballs played a game of tag inside the Ocelot, with the regulars interjecting with occasional jeers. That “game” continued on into the night, until the furballs fell asleep with satisfied looks on their faces. Dale took them back to their mother the next day, signaling the end of this chaos.

3: Sequel: The Platinum-haired Maiden and the Golden-eyed Maiden Make a Grave Visit

As of late (which is to say ever since returning from Vassilios), Dale had spent each and every day lazing about and being an all around good-for-nothing. If it were just a few weeks, that could be written off as him taking a vacation, but when that became a few months, those around him couldn't help but start looking at him differently.

Meanwhile, Latina unsurprisingly spent every day working busily away. The fragile look she had about her while recovering was completely gone now. It seemed that having something to do really was good for her.

"At a glance, it kind of looks like Latina is supporting you, doesn't it?"

"I feel like Latina really *could* support me just fine, even if I became completely dependent on her," Dale replied, punching holes into the documents that Rita had eliminated from the mountain in front of her and then binding them with string. More than helping out, he was just killing time. And Rita didn't feel comfortable trusting him with any complex work, as his gaze was constantly following Latina around.

Rita continued to pile up the documents she was finished with in front of Dale, feeling exasperated by him all the while.

"This has to be presented to the temple of Akhdar, so leave it separate... Well, it may be true that you don't have to work, but how about searching for a new place to live?"

"I worked several years straight without ever taking time off, so I'm just taking a bit of a vacation. That's all..."

The reason Rita had said he didn't need to work was because Dale was a hero on the global scale, one who had carried out the great task of eliminating the demon lords. On top of that, it had been more than just one. He had been responsible for the defeat of the Second, Fourth, and Seventh Demon Lords. (It

had not been made public that he had eliminated more demon lords than just the Calamities. That was because he had carried out his vengeance on those demon lords like a skilled assassin, ensuring he didn't leave behind any evidence.) The reward he had received for that was enormous. He could quite literally spend the rest of his life fooling around, never working again.

Even just having a direct contract under the duke had been earning Dale more money than a normal adventurer could ever dream of. The reason that Rita and Kenneth didn't try to stop Dale when he first said he would take in the young Latina was because they were aware of his robust finances. Those hefty savings also made it so Dale could buy all sorts of things for the young girl without worrying about the cost, even including expensive magical tools from time to time.

Despite being raised by a man like that, Latina had remained extremely frugal. That was a result of her own personality.

Before responding to Rita, Dale glanced over at Latina. And then, in a bit of a quiet voice, he said, "I just can't right now. Latina still isn't back to her old self yet, right?"

"...I see," Rita agreed after having her voice catch in her throat for a second.

Rita had also watched over Latina all this time, as a guardian. And as a woman herself and the mother of two children, Rita was able to notice things that Dale and Kenneth couldn't.

"A whole lot happened... so at least for now, I think it's best not to change things too much. And I want Latina to be there when we decide on things like that, too."

"That girl really does push herself too hard..." Rita said with a sigh, looking at Dale. Her expression showed clear concern.

"...Is it really best to just leave things up to the passage of time?"

"I'm not sure she has things all sorted out in her mind just yet... She was pushing herself the whole time during her visit 'back home.' It feels to me like she's only just now gotten a chance to relax."

Dale felt that even though her sister was now its ruler, Vassilios wasn't a place

she was especially comfortable staying in, especially seeing how she had once been exiled from there.

She had also really strained herself in order to be as little of a hindrance as possible.

She really did look relieved ever since returning to Kreuz and their everyday lives there. Dale didn't feel like she would welcome another sudden change in environment.

At the same time, Latina also felt more than a little responsible for Dale's cruel annihilation of the demon lords, leading to some emotional instability. Dale wasn't especially aware of that, though.

Ever since he was young, Dale made a clear distinction between his "work" and the rest of his life. If not for that, he would have fallen apart long ago.

However, Latina couldn't do that. Unlike Chrysos, in her position with so many responsibilities, there wasn't anything she could do about things right now.

And so, she swallowed her feelings of wanting to atone, knowing all the while that she would eventually have to find a way to do so.

Latina insisted on sticking to her normal everyday life as part of her quest to bring some stability to the whirlwind of emotions in her heart.

Dale may have had his hidden deplorable bits about him, but he actually did have more reasons behind his current vacation than just his economic status.

First off, now that he'd eliminated the Demon Lords of Calamity, there were no more enemies left that he needed to fight. So for the time being, Dale wouldn't be getting any work as a hero.

Another big reason was the fact that his basic abilities had been so greatly elevated by him becoming a demon.

Dale had been accepting such frequent work in the forest despite his robust finances in order to keep up with his training. It helped him to maintain his muscles and temper his sword and magic techniques. It also served the crucial purpose of throwing him into a dangerous environment, so that his combat senses didn't dull.

Now that he had become a demon, though, his basic abilities had been elevated, and he didn't have to worry about them ever degrading. His combat senses may dull a bit, but after discussing that with a certain demon lord, they decided that may actually be for the best for the sake of world peace.

Thanks to all those various reasons, Dale didn't have any need to force himself to work, so he was enjoying a long period of time off.

And also, he didn't want to work. Or to be more accurate, he didn't want to have to leave Latina's side in order to work.

"If you've got free time, then there's something I'd like to ask you to do..." Kenneth said, poking his head out from the kitchen.

"What is it?"

"There are some young adventurers who just broke out on their own, and they made a request... They want to take on an escort job, but they don't have much experience, so they'd like someone to give them guidance..."

"...I've hardly ever done any escort jobs at all. The only times I did any were when I was with your party."

Dale had built up experience as an adventurer alongside Kenneth, who had been acknowledged by his grandmother, after leaving his home village.

He had been well-versed in combat and camping skills even for someone with a background like his, but that alone wasn't enough to make it as an adventurer. Kenneth taught him all sorts of things, like the tricks to traveling and negotiating with clients. When Kenneth retired as an adventurer and married into running the Dancing Ocelot, Dale also set out on his own and began taking requests directly from Duke Eldstedt.

After that point Dale primarily undertook extermination requests, so he hardly had any experience with escort jobs.

Kenneth should have also been well aware of that fact.

"You see... those adventurers and Latina hit it off with each other. The conversation went in a direction where they figured they could handle it if the person they were escorting was also skilled, even if the task took them to a

somewhat dangerous place...”

“It won’t go so easily though, right?” Dale replied, his expression growing grim for a different sort of reason.

Just when did Latina hit it off with these adventurers? he was wondering. They sure had guts, getting close to Latina when he wasn’t around. He would make sure they realized *thoroughly* just what they’d done.

“Even if Latina was all on her own outside of town, she could probably manage somehow.”

Dale had said that because of her blessing as a demon lord, which meant she wouldn’t lose her life even if some enemy attacked her. On top of that, she was also a highly skilled magic user, which meant she should be capable of dealing with a great variety of situations even all by herself.

However, that was ultimately something he had to keep to himself.

“But if some lesser bastards were there dragging her down... she’d try to back them up, and it would end up being more dangerous than going solo.”

“Yeah.”

Cooperation between multiple people relied on more than individual ability, it was a different type of skill. And as she hadn’t practiced or trained in that field, it was a skill that Latina lacked.

That was why Kenneth simply agreed with Dale’s words of concern.

“So what about if you accompanied them? You could also handle a request to gather a ton of information in order to make a map of the forest while you’re at it.”

“A map of the forest?”

“They’re making a map in order to open a path to Vassilios, but apparently first they want to fill in the numerous gaps in their knowledge. There wouldn’t be any concerns about you getting lost, so you’d be perfect for the task, right?”

“Well... I guess that’s true, but...”

Because Dale specialized in Earth magic, he didn’t have to worry about losing

his way. Even if he walked into an area he was unfamiliar with, that magic would be able to save his skin.

“What are you talking about?” Latina asked, suddenly poking her head in. Emma was walking behind her, clinging to the elder girl tightly.

“Latina...”

“Exploring the forest, like we’d been discussing. It wouldn’t be any problem if Dale accompanied you, right?”

The instant Kenneth replied to Latina in that manner, Dale realized he’d been had.

Just as Dale had expected, he saw Latina’s expression brighten. Seeing that look on her face, there was only one option left to him.

However, the words Latina said next were a little bit different than what Dale had expected.

“Um, the investigation of the forest was also a request from me.”

“From you, Latina?”

“I could have just asked you directly, but since it had to do with Vassilios, I wanted to involve a lot of the adventurers who come to this shop, too, so I went with a request.”

“...Was it a request from Chrysos?”

“Yeah.”

Dale was perplexed as to when Latina had apparently gotten into contact with her sister.

In actuality, Latina hadn’t gotten into contact with Chrysos directly. As the ruler of a nation with plenty of responsibilities, Chrysos couldn’t so lightly exchange letters with her sister in a foreign nation.

However, Sylvia was in Vassilios. Sylvia had previously abused her privileges to have private exchanges with Latina using the Dancing Ocelot’s Akhdar message board. With Sylvia acting as an in-between, the sisters were able to use the information network of the Akhdar temples to carry out a basic exchange of

information.

“And then, we happened to have that discussion about them wanting to take on an escort job, so it kind of turned out that way.”

“I didn’t even notice...”

“Their request came through Mr. Syl. They’re pretty close to my age, and being in the Ocelot was kind of worrying for them...” Latina said, then thought for a bit after seeing the sulky look on Dale’s face. She then followed up by saying, “They’re a party of all girls, after all.”

With that statement alone, Dale’s mood recovered drastically.

Female adventurers received a great deal of escort requests.

Because he knew that fact, Dale finally accepted all the details of the conversation up until now. It was a truly deplorable reaction to have.

When the client requesting an escort was a woman, they often couldn’t help but be hesitant about dealing with a grim-looking, vulgar male adventurer. After all, there was no guarantee that adventurers always behaved themselves properly. When hiring someone, it was important to make sure their character could be trusted so the client wouldn’t be sexually assaulted. However, that was very difficult to do when it came to someone you were meeting for the first time.

As a result, such clients generally sought female guards, or at least a party that included women.

When the client was a man, there was a tendency to request someone who looked strong, choosing based on appearances. But on longer jobs, the sort of attentiveness characteristic of women led to the added benefit of raising their names as adventurers.

It was a different story when it came to parties whose behavior was already well known and proven, but when they had that much of a reputation, they would also have to be a group with significant skill that would require a great deal of money to hire. And above all else, when a party became that skilled, there was no need for them to accept escort requests.

Considering those circumstances, it made more sense for female adventurers to focus on the sort of skills required for escort requests, rather than those needed for magical beast extermination and harvesting requests.

It was praiseworthy, seeing young novices seeking to better themselves by gaining the skills they expected to need down the line.

“For a while after first starting out as adventurers, they had done harvesting and small magical beast extermination work for a party Mr. Syl introduced them to.”

“The standard routine for beginners, huh?”

“That’s what Mr. Syl said, too. The basics of using weapons and tools, and how to accept work, and report things... It’s a little like all the stuff I learned while traveling with you, I think.”

“How to travel and camp are essential skills... Novices are generally all folks who only know life in towns and villages, even when it comes to adventurers,” Dale said, and Latina nodded.

“And so, they said they wanted to be taught what they needed, and then when they didn’t need the support, they would take on jobs on their own. But they’re all women, so Mr. Syl came to me, thinking I could relate.”

“Ugh...” Dale groaned, but grasped what had happened.

Latina served as a sort of cushion between the veteran and novice adventurers who used the Ocelot. When faced with their idol, both the old-timer veterans and the youngsters wanted to show their good sides. As a result, there was less quarreling and trouble-making, to everyone’s mutual benefit.

Female adventurers found it easier to use compared to other shops in the same business to start with, as one of the owners, Rita, was a woman. With the addition of Latina’s presence, it made for an environment that was especially friendly to women.

Thanks to that conversation it was decided that Latina was to depart from Kreuz for the first time in a while, accompanied by Dale. As Latina was unconscious and carried when she went to Vassilios, she didn’t count it.

“Dale, Dale, what sort of clothes should I wear?”

“Any clothes would look cute on you, Latina,” Dale responded, swerving a bit from the intended meaning of the question.

Hearing Dale’s response, Latina’s cheeks flushed with embarrassment, and she complained in a dissatisfied voice, “That’s not what I mean. It’s not like we’re going on a trip, so is it alright if I don’t worry about dressing too heavily?”

“Well, the season being what it is... It also got pretty chilly at night when we went on our trip before. But with that said, if you wear too much, you may end up getting overheated while moving about.”

“Hmm...”

Dale smiled while watching Latina prepare, standing and thinking in front of her clothing storage.

“Well, this time you’d probably be fine even in casual wear. I’ll be preparing all sorts of equipment, after all. However, we’ll be going through thickets and stuff, so try not to have any exposed skin.”

Latina kept on preparing while they had that conversation, looking like she was getting ready to go on a picnic.

The place they were going to wasn’t so safe and secure that you could just take it easy and play around there. The fact that Latina was able to act so casually in spite of that was proof of her absolute trust in Dale.

“Woof, woof, woof.”

Vint made a sulking appeal for attention, announcing that he would hold down the fort and intentionally rolling over into Latina and Dale’s point of view, but unfortunately, he was ignored for the time being.

The following day, before noon, Dale and Latina headed for the southern gate together. When Latina laid eyes on the party of three standing near the gate, she enthusiastically waved hello.

“Adelina,” Latina called out, and the group seemed to notice. The three girls straightened their posture, unable to hide their nervousness as they greeted Dale and Latina. Latina tilted her head a bit at that reaction from her friends.

“Are you nervous because of the job? This is everyone’s first time meeting, right? This is Dale, my, um... fiancé.”

That introduction from Latina alone had been enough to provide Dale’s motivation for the day.

“I’m Dale Reki. Pleased to meet you,” Dale said, giving a brief introduction. He was wearing his usual equipment of a black magical beast leather coat and a gauntlet on his left hand, as well as a sword and knife for weapons. The only difference was that today, he was carrying enough luggage that it made it hard to imagine he was just heading into that familiar forest.

Having heard Dale’s introduction, the three girls stood up even straighter.

“My name is Paula Zenkel. Thank you in advance for your guidance today.”

Paula, who had taken a step forward and got things started, was lacking in anything especially valuable. That was fitting for a novice, but her gear was worthy of a passing mark. Dale judged that her equipment would serve her reliably in her role as a vanguard fighter. He had also sensed a bit of her leadership skills. That was just what he would expect from someone introduced by Sylvester, though.

“This is Elvira Wentz. And the other girl is Adelina Beinl.

“I’m Elvira.”

“I’m Adelina. It’s my pleasure to meet you.”

The two girls Paula had introduced repeated their names, looking rather nervous as they did so. Judging from their equipment, Elvira also appeared to be a warrior, while Adelina was apparently in charge of rear support.

Without Dale even needing to interject, Paula took the lead as they exited Kreuz through the southern gate, while Adelina continued to provide logistical support. Taking up the rear in order to properly surround targets they were guarding was Elvira. It was a by-the-book approach, but at the same time you could also say this demonstrated a good grasp of the fundamentals.

Dale was carefully observing the three girl team he was technically in charge of providing guidance for. Latina on the other hand seemed to be enjoying

herself, and wasn't feeling nervous in the least.

"It really has been a while. I just don't seem to get out of town very often, you know?" Latina said, turning this way and that as she did so.

The way she was acting made her seem younger than she was, and was proof of how much Latina was enjoying herself.

While almost bouncing along as she walked, Latina looked up at Dale.

"Dale, that's a lot of luggage, isn't it? Are you alright? Should I help you carry it?"

"I'm fine. Don't worry about it."

Dale was carrying so much luggage because today's outing was "training."

"Normally we'd be done and head home before the day was done, so we wouldn't need all this. But today I want to check their ability to make camp, too."

"But you've got my share of the luggage too, right...?"

"That it's your share only makes me all the more alright carrying it."

It was immediately after their departure, and they were already having such a sickeningly sweet conversation. Though such sights were common around the Ocelot, it really was something everyone had already had more than enough of. In fact, the three girls were already starting to look sick of it themselves.

"Thank goodness the weather is looking so good."

Latina was clearly enjoying this outing, so much so that her bad habit of getting distracted and letting her gaze wander all over was showing. Though with that said, Dale had no intention of giving her a warning today.

There was no guarantee that the target one was escorting would always be attentive and vigilant, after all.

It most certainly wasn't because Dale found Latina enjoying herself to be utterly adorable and a joy to watch.

"Preparing for bad weather is also an important part of training, though..." Dale responded, while also thinking that he wouldn't let Latina camp in bad

weather in this chilly season. Naturally, he would immediately decide to postpone. She may say that would be fun, too, but there were some things he just couldn't allow.

"You've got a lot of luggage, too, Adelina. Are you okay?"

Not realizing the contents of what Dale was currently muttering to himself, Latina smiled and asked that to Adelina, who was walking ahead of them. Adelina dropped her walking speed just a bit to come up alongside Latina and replied, "It's because I can't get directly involved in combat. This way, the two of them can immediately jump into battle without having to worry about their luggage."

"I see... Before, when I went on a trip with Dale, we got a horse to carry it all, but I guess you can't do that, huh?"

"I'd love to be the sort of person who could use a carriage to carry our stuff, but that can be difficult depending on the details of the job."

From looking at them as they carried on this conversation, Latina and Adelina seemed to be fairly close.

From Dale's point of view, the three girls had been exceedingly stiff and nervous the whole time, ever since they left Kreuz. But that seemed to fade a bit for Adelina as she was talking to Latina.

Even though they may not have been used to such things, this line of work required a firm grip on one's own nerves in order to make sure the client was safe. However, Dale thought with a strained smile that this situation probably wouldn't last for long, and was trending in a good direction.

It would be no exaggeration to call Latina's natural ability to calm down those around her a "special technique."

Dale thought such things to himself, having no idea that the greatest reason for that nervousness was being faced with a hero who was becoming a modern-day legend. He had no self-awareness at all regarding his reputation as some amazing champion, a target of admiration for novice adventurers.

Partway through her conversation with Adelina, Latina looked up at Dale and smiled.

“Adelina can use simple chants for healing and defensive wall magic. But she can’t get them to consistently activate, so she’s been consulting with me.”

“Huh...”

That was definitely something, being able to use magic despite being a novice. If she could use that in real combat, then that would be plenty worthy of praise.

Latina could handle magic even more easily than Adelina could now since back when she was a small child, but that was just because she was so out of the norm.

“Normally if someone wanted to learn to use magic, even just simple chants, that would require quite a bit of compensation. But... Latina said not worry about that.”

“That may be the case when it comes to teaching someone from scratch. All I did was offer a little advice, though. And it was just second-hand from Lady Rose, at that.”

While listening to Latina say that, Dale thought on how Rose was acknowledged as one of the foremost priestesses and magic users in all of Laband by the duke himself. He also considered the matter that Latina had happened to be granted the opportunity to study under the sorts of instructors one normally could never learn under, no matter how much they wished for it. This included his former teacher, a high ranking priest of Asfar.

Since it was the winter there was a somewhat dreary, lonesome feel to their surroundings. But as they were blessed with good weather today, there was also a warm, gentle, pleasant-feeling sunlight shining down upon them.

Naturally, until they reached the forest they weren’t in magical beast territory, so it wasn’t very dangerous. Watching these girls of the same age have a pleasant chat as they walked along made for an incredibly peaceful sight. Of course, Dale also had an extremely gentle expression on his face while watching Latina.

It was then that Dale suddenly sensed a presence and then glanced to his side. Elvira, who had been serving as their rear guard, was now standing a step closer than she had been before and was looking at Dale. Elvira was taller than

Paula and Adelina, so that meant her gaze was all the closer to Dale's. Unlike Paula, who had such a plain appearance that she could be mistaken for a man, this girl had a feminine appeal about her. She shot Dale a smile, acting a bit flirtatious.

"Sir Dale, you've been taking on harsh jobs as an adventurer since you were even younger than us, right?"

Not even breaking out in a strained laugh, Dale readily replied, "...An adventurer shouldn't be trying to entice each and every one of her clients."

Dale remained calm and composed as he saw through the fact that Elvira's actions were intentional, and he also wasn't the sort to get taken in by a girl so many years his younger. Of course when he thought about his relationship with Latina, who was the same age as these other girls, he openly exposed his hypocrisy and ultimately dodged confronting the subject, but that just proved how special Latina was to him.

Even when getting involved with noble high society, Dale was able to calmly deal with whatever came his direction. In a way, his deplorable actions when Latina was around didn't allow for a proper assessment of the man.

Though with that said, it was also hard to say that the "proper assessment" of society at large captured his true essence.

Elvira looked half-disappointed, half-relieved by Dale's reaction. Ultimately, though, the satisfaction of not being let down by the hero she idolized brought a smile to her face.

"It's my secret to success in life. I mean, Paula's the way she is, too. So I figured if someone was going to look at me as a woman, then I should at least try to use that to my advantage."

"You may be thinking highly of yourself, but don't underestimate what others are capable of."

"Thank you for the warning."

Perhaps because of the long period of time he had spent as Latina's guardian, he was far more accustomed to seeing things from the perspective one would expect from someone of his age.

Dale found it hard to judge whether it was an honor or otherwise to have Kenneth and the others give their stamp of approval as overseers of her safety.

Before long, the forest came into view.

This forest was one of the reasons behind Kreuz's growth. As magical beast territory, it was a place where many adventurers gathered with their eyes on its many resources, supporting the abundance of Kreuz greatly even now.

"According to Kenneth, they're planning to open a path through here when diplomatic relations with Vassilios are established."

"Vassilios is isolated from other countries by this forest and a desert. Chrysos also said that she'd like to someday construct a port beyond the desert, but that her main priority was to develop this path between her nation and Laband," Latina responded with a smile, apparently having heard of her sister's hopes for the future.

"Up until now there have only been animal trails... And those paths haven't been carefully marked on maps, obviously."

"But even so, thanks to the cooperation of the regulars, we more or less have a grasp of the lay of the land. When they traveled on foot to Vassilios they were accompanied by an Akhdar priestess, so apparently there are detailed records."



Those records would in turn act to provide a portion of the funding for the temple of Akhdar. The principle conduct of priests of that god was to gather information, and there was no guarantee that would directly lead to profit. It was also possible that their expenses could overtake their earnings. Information like this, which one could expect great profit from, was an important source of income.

“Then what is the new information they want?” Dale questioned.

“You see, this job is also a sort of personal request from me and Chrysos...” Latina replied with a somewhat lonesome smile, and then spread out the rough map of the forest before them. She pointed out an area a little removed from the irregular line indicating the shortest path between Vassilios and Kreuz.

“This is around where you and I first met, right, Dale?”

“Hmm? Yeah.”

“This is the area that Chrysos wanted to know about. Where Rag and I passed through... I’m not able to remember everything myself, though. But Chrysos said she wanted to know what it was like when Rag and I came to Laband after parting with her.”

“...I see,” Dale responded, intentionally using a cheerful tone of voice.

Doing so meant following her memories through to the point where death parted Latina and her father, as well as touching upon the painful memories of when she was exiled. But even so, she had apparently steeled herself for facing her past head on.

Dale hadn’t expected Latina to tell him the precise reason why she decided this investigation should be carried out now. But she had told him anyways because they had decided they wouldn’t hide things from each other any longer.

However, she was a bit of a natural airhead. Which is to say, at times she couldn’t quite read the room or the like. Dale could tell that, having raised her while pretending to be the same way himself.

From the moment they stepped into the forest, the group of three was

immediately on edge once again. Figuring there was no helping that considering their current abilities, Dale gave an awkward smile. As they were still just starting out the girls had primarily stuck to the outskirts of the forest, but now they were treading deep inside alongside Dale and Latina. The magical beasts would be showing up a lot more often, and they'd be a whole lot more dangerous, too. Dale and Vint may have often wandered into this part of the forest without a care in the world, but that was quite different from how adventurers at large would approach it.

Even just a little rustling in the brush was enough to cause the group of three girls to jump. Dale found it interesting that it wasn't them but Latina, an ordinary citizen, who was able to maintain her composure.

"Latina?"

"There's no feeling of danger. And since you're not putting your hand on your sword, it's alright, isn't it?" Latina responded without a care, looking at Dale.

Apparently she wasn't any more on edge than she needed to be thanks to her natural ability to sense danger, as well as her absolute trust in Dale.

"I won't tell you to relax as much as Latina, but..." Dale started with a strained smile, looking at Paula tightly gripping her weapon. "An escort job isn't about beating magical beasts or anything like that. It's about securing the safety of your client above all else. You should focus your attention on carefully watching your surroundings and predicting potential dangers."

There were a great deal of trees and undergrowth around, making for a great deal of cover, so that was easier said than done in this place. But put another way, if they could succeed in such a task in this forest, it would make the group of three a great deal more experienced.

That was why Dale had made that remark, but as soon as he said that, a large shadow flitted in between the trees in the distance. In that instant, Dale saw both Paula and Adelina brace their shoulders.

"Don't make any noise. We're downwind, and it hasn't noticed us." Paula had been readying herself to launch a preemptive attack, only for Dale to hold her back with a quiet yet sharp voice. "There's no need to fight each and every magical beast. You should consider just letting them pass, depending on the

situation. It's also important to choose to retreat when things get out of control."

Dale glanced over at Latina, and found that she had made the correct judgment and was calmly holding her breath. As she could cast delicate magic even without a tool to assist her, Latina would be able to deploy a magical barrier to protect everyone here if push came to shove.

Even though they were just getting started, they were adventurers, a group that claimed to specialize in fighting skills. Dale couldn't help but give an awkward chuckle at the fact that she was more accustomed to such things.

Just as Dale had said, the magical beast in the distance passed on by without noticing them. The tension visibly drained from Paula and the others. They shouldn't have let their guard down so readily, but Dale wasn't harsh enough to tell them that right now.

The pressure one felt facing a small magical beast didn't even compare to that from a medium or large one. It was no surprise that just the thought of having to face it had caused them to freeze in place.

We really do have a different foundation to work off of, seeing how I participated in the hunting groups ever since I was a kid...

His home village of Tislow had a culture and customs separated from the world at large, and were a clan of exceptional ability.

After having numerous such encounters with magical beasts, they arrived at a slightly more open area. The place had repeated a cycle of being overgrown and then that growth withering away, and was now covered in a great deal of weeds.

"It's because we haven't come for a while..."

"Yeah..."

The tip of a large white stone could be vaguely seen from within the growth.

While showing clear guilt at having left her father's grave untended for such a long period of time, Latina slipped on leather gloves and looked ahead with a tense expression. It was the expression of someone with a passion for cleaning.

“...You three, take lookout. If you discover a magical beast, you don’t necessarily have to attack it. And depending on the circumstances, I can join in.”

As Latina’s objective right now was obviously stationary, it wasn’t possible to retreat this time. That was why Dale had made that statement, but the reaction from the girls was a little different than what they had shown before. Dale had no idea whatsoever that that was because of the possibility of seeing a legendary hero in battle.

Weeds that had withered in the winter could be pulled free without having to reap them, but even so, it was no easy task.

“We should’ve brought Vint along...”

That pup who had announced he would hold down the fort specialized in Wind magic. He was strangely good at reaping down weeds and gathering them up, so he could have easily taken care of the task.

A little bit removed from the gravestone, Dale used his Earth magic to open a hole and threw the withered weeds into it, then dealt with them using a fire-starting magical device. He also kept an eye on things to make sure that the flames didn’t spread to the dried surroundings. Since Dale was able to use Water magic, putting out fires was a specialty of his.

Latina kept on diligently working away all the while, and thanks to that, the area around the grave was soon looking neat and tidy. She brought forth some water using a magical device, and then wiped away the dirt and filth from her father’s gravestone. And then, Latina knelt silently for a while in front of the now pure white gravestone.

Far sooner than Dale had expected, Latina stood up and turned around to face him.

“Was that really enough? That was pretty brief.”

“Yeah,” Latina responded with a somewhat lonesome-looking smile. “I was able to check that it hadn’t fallen into ruin and managed to clean it up, so it’s fine. And also...” After being at a loss for words for a moment, Latina continued on as if it was nothing at all, “I managed... to tell him that I got to see Chrysos, so that’s enough.”

Dale guessed from Latina's expression that she didn't want to expose too much of her inner self in front of Paula and the others.

I guess if she let herself get too emotional, she'd end up crying...

And so, Dale put his arm around the girl who was trying to act tough and pulled her in close, then gently stroked her head to console her.

"Now then... shall we continue a bit further in? I don't know how you made it this far either, Latina, but I guess we'll need to head towards Vassilios and confirm the terrain either way, right?"

Based on what he had heard from Latina, Dale guessed that her father wasn't accustomed to camping and the like, but he was apparently a prudent person with a great deal of knowledge. The young Latina hadn't understood the details at the time, but Dale supposed the man had decided on a precise destination, carefully navigating based on the positions of the stars. If he was aiming for a place where people lived, then his goal had most likely been Kreuz.

"I don't think... we should be straying too far from whatever path you took, probably."

The path they hoped to construct to Vassilios would be a highway. For the sake of the future, the goal would be to create a road that carriages could use, to facilitate trade between both countries. As such, it would be necessary to avoid swampland and places with bad footing. Checking the area for potential hazards was also one of their objectives on this trip.

Latina sneaked a peek at the notes Dale was jotting down while walking along and tilted her head. His writing was overly concise and used plenty of symbols, so Latina couldn't quite understand what it all meant.

"It's ultimately just notes... I just need to be able to understand it myself later, so I use abbreviations."

"It's like it's in code..."

"Well, that's more or less how things go when it comes to handling information."

Dale continued his investigation nonchalantly until the time came for him to

select a location to camp, before the sun went down. He set down the luggage he had been carrying, and then began assembling their tent without asking for Latina's assistance.

"Latina..." Dale called out to the girl who had just stood up.

"Right. I won't go far, and if anything happens, I'll call for you," Latina responded with a slightly strained smile.

Latina's gaze fell on the group of three, who were sitting about in a state of exhaustion. They hadn't ended up in combat a single time, but being in such a constant state of alertness had pushed their mental fatigue to the limit.

Latina entered into the forest and started to gather up firewood. It was a dry season, so there was fortunately no lack of kindling to be found. Latina worked at a brisk pace, and after several trips to and from the campground, there was a mountain of firewood to work with.

It grew chilly at night during this time of year, so there was no such thing as too much firewood.

Latina then started to prepare the fire itself. She went with an open-air fire rather than constructing a furnace so that they could warm themselves around it at night. Then, she set up a pole over it so that a pot could be suspended there.

"It's going to get even colder, so... it'd be good to be able to get even a little warmer..." Latina muttered to herself, and then got started preparing food as if it were routine. As she was their client, her actions left Adelina looking flustered, but Latina reined the girl in with a single glance.

"Alright, I've prepared the meat with salt and herbs."

As she cheerfully worked away at her outdoor cooking, it seemed quite apparent that she was enjoying the circumstances.

"I'll let it cook nice and slowly, so I suppose it'll be done around when the sun sets... And I've also made a dessert to go with it. If I heat that up a bit, I think it'll make for a good meal."

What Latina considered "outdoor cooking" had somehow diverged from what

was the standard for adventurers.

She skillfully set up the pot at the proper distance from the flame, so that the salted meat would simmer just right over low heat. Once she had finished making a clear soup base, she added in some diced up vegetables. The taste went without saying, but the way that she had also chosen to focus on its ability to warm someone up really showed her attention to detail.

Once Dale finished preparing the tent and his other tasks, he approached the fire and was the first to be handed one of the smoked meat sandwiches Latina had prepared. Latina then went about preparing portions for Paula and the others.

“I made a lot of soup, so eat as much as you want, alright? You don’t need to worry about leaving food for tomorrow morning.”

As a light eater, Latina simply lightly toasted a slice of bread with just a single slice of cheese on top and then bit into it. She also took a taste of the soup, and gave a satisfied smile at her own work.

Everyone else present also seemed to enjoy the meal. Looking ecstatic to see the pot now completely empty, Latina then swiftly cleaned it out and filled it with hot water. She started preparing tea in it, and then went into the tent with her and Dale’s portions of dessert.

“Everyone else’s portions are over there. You can eat them as is, or I think it would also work well to heat them over the fire for a bit. And feel free to pour tea for yourselves, alright?”

The tent that Dale had brought along was big enough for Latina and himself. Latina looked a little guilty that only they got to relax inside, but there was no way that it would be alright for adventurers to occupy their client’s tent.

And also, the three girls had been tense the entire time. It would be no surprise that they’d want to have a little time to let their hair down, free of the watchful eyes of their observer. It was for precisely this reason that Dale had hurried Latina into the tent. It most certainly wasn’t because he wanted to spend some blissful time alone together.

When Dale had taken Latina on a trip to his home village, he hadn’t put up a

tent. That was because it had been a more comfortable season for spending time outside, and also because there hadn't been anyone to watch over them. As a highly experienced adventurer, Dale had wanted to avoid a situation in which his vision and their escape route were obstructed.

This time, though, it was a chilly time of year and they had people outside to keep watch, so he had prepared a tent. He had proper reasons for doing so. It most assuredly wasn't to monopolize the sight of Latina wearing a blanket and holding a piping hot cup of tea.

"Hey, Dale," Latina said, handing Dale a slice of baked pie with fruit compote filling.

"Hmm? What is it?"

"Chrysos said that she'd come visit Laband in the not too distant future."

That caught Dale off guard, causing him to sputter. They were fortunately spared having to deal with a serious mess inside the tent, though, because his mouth had been empty at the time.

That reaction was only natural, as her statement was one worthy of being classified as a national secret. Calling her decision to blurt it out here "airheaded" wouldn't even begin to cover it.

Latina calmly kept on talking, paying no heed to Dale's reaction.

"Before, Chrysos said that she wanted to visit Rag's grave... I think that this investigation will also help contribute to that."

"I don't think... that'd be easy to pull off, you know...?" Dale wrung out, breaking out in a sweat. Latina tilted her head a bit.

"There will still be some time before diplomatic relations between the two countries are officially established."

"That's true..."

"But apparently when she was talking to Lady Rose, she learned that the way of life in Vassilios and Laband differed an awful lot. So much so that she figured she wouldn't know how to entertain Labandese envoys... So it seems she plans to come and learn at least a little about Laband's customs."

“Even so, I don’t think that’s the sort of job you’d normally have the ruler of a nation handle...”

“It’s because the best speaker of Western Continental in all of Vassilios... is Chrysos.”

Latina may have said that, but they were talking about a demon lord with a serious sister complex. It was a given that Chrysos had hurriedly set up an opportunity to meet with her twin, and then come up with a reason for doing so afterwards.

Dale was always saying that Chrysos’s comments about him were awful, but the same could clearly be said about his opinion of her, especially at times like this.

Really, they were both at fault.

“It may be difficult to set up, but it sure would be nice if we could meet, even for just a little while.” Latina’s entirely sensible statement was said with a smile on her face.

By normal standards, a townspeople like Latina would never have a chance to meet with a foreign dignitary such as Chrysos.

But I’m sure Chrysos would definitely make it happen...

The reason Dale was mentally sweating was because Laband’s elite were surely aware of the fact that Chrysos wanted to meet with her sister. If Chrysos visited this country, Latina was sure to receive an invitation to the capital. And the duke and the like would also be aware that the famed Fairy Princess was Chrysos’s twin sister.

At this rate, her relationship with Vassilios’s rule may end up a well known fact amongst high society.

Just what sort of standing would that leave him in?

Dale gave a sigh and then hugged Latina.

He paid no heed to the blank look on her face, simply embracing her tighter. The looming end to his time of relaxation was all the more reason to enjoy himself while he could.

“Dale?”

“Hmm... Now that I think of it, there’s something I wanted to ask, Latina.”

“What is it?”

“Did you really not have any concerns, introducing me to members of the opposite sex?”

“Huh?”

Latina’s big grey eyes blinked in surprise, and she stared at Dale with a look of bewilderment. Since he was her “guardian,” she had introduced her friends to Dale ever since she was a child. This was the first time he had ever asked her something like that.

“You mean Adelina and the others?”

“So you’re... fine with me getting near other girls?”

There was a hint of teasing to Dale’s question. He wasn’t overly serious, but Latina still thought on what he was saying.

Latina was aware that she did get jealous, in her own way. Her own low self-esteem contributed to that.

But at the same time, she trusted Dale.

“I mean, I know that you don’t look at them that way. And also...” Latina started to continue on, only to suddenly stop herself. She averted her gaze from Dale and remained silent.

“‘And also’?”

“It’s nothing...”

“You’re not *acting* like it’s nothing.”

“I don’t doubt you. That’s the truth,” Latina said while wiping away sweat, clearly acting suspiciously.

“Oh right, you were jealous because Chrysos and I were getting along before, right?”

That had happened back in Vassilios.

Dale and Chrysos had found themselves to be kindred spirits in terms of underhandedness. Latina, however, took that as them getting along exceptionally well, making her a bit jealous.

Apparently Dale's comment had hit the mark, as she was clearly panicking.

The result of that jealousy had been a complex situation that left Latina red-faced and wiping away sweat. That was because the deplorable hero had been left with limited options to clear away Latina's doubts.

"I'm not jealous! I'm not..."

"Hey, Latina. It actually makes me a bit sad to hear you say you're not jealous at all, you know?"

"Then, what should I...?"

Naturally, the tent wasn't completely soundproof.

As their voices grew steadily louder, that sickeningly sweet argument leaked out. Latina wasn't aware, but the group of three were lined up outside, listening with dead eyes.

Dale was even more awful, as he knew they were there but pretended otherwise.

In other words, it was business as usual.

When morning came, the three girls greeted Latina with incredibly lukewarm gazes as she crawled out of the tent. Latina looked bewildered at first, not immediately grasping the meaning behind those gazes. Then, her cheeks went beet red.

"W-we didn't do anything! We just slept together, because it was cold... but we didn't do anything, alright?!"

"Ah... Yeah. We know. It's fine."

"Do you really mean that?!"

Even from outside the tent, the girls could tell that the pair really hadn't done anything. But even leaving that matter aside, they had still been so sickeningly sweet in their intimacy that the girls felt on the verge of a stomachache.

While Latina and Adelina were carrying on in that manner, Dale also stepped outside. Judging from the glares they were shooting him, Paula and Elvira seemed to now find him utterly deplorable.

That was the usual state of affairs for Dale lately, having people immediately go from respecting him to finding him despicable.

Latina hurriedly prepared breakfast despite the unbearable gazes on her. Though she struggled in vain to rein in her embarrassment, it had already passed its breaking point. She was only barely resisting the urge to flee in the face of the occasional “ah”s and “ugh”s surrounding her.

“Still, considering the circumstances...”

“Yeah.”

“It sure is tasty, isn’t it...?”

Regardless of her distraction, the food Latina had made was more than satisfactory in both volume and flavor. And despite their differences in occupation, the group of three saw the overwhelming difference between them in terms of feminine appeal, making them break out in slightly awkward expressions.

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Latina’s first real outing in some time ended without any other real issues, aside from that brief bit of embarrassment. However, the explosive statement she had made at that time came to fruition even more quickly than Dale had expected.

The Dancing Ocelot acted as a sort of “branch office” for the temple of Akhdar, which served as an information gathering agency. That made it a place where one could always obtain the latest information.

And so, through completely natural means, Rita ended up being the first one to hear about it.

“Apparently a group of envoys from Vassilios is coming to Laband.”

“So quickly?”

Kenneth’s reaction was entirely natural, but Dale, on the other hand, was left

wearing an awkward expression. Latina, too, averted her gaze a bit.

Her reaction didn't escape Dale's notice.

"Latina, do you know something else?"

"...I can't say."

"You *do* know more, don't you? I mean, considering that phrasing..."

"Hold on a second. Are you two hiding something?"

Dale glanced at Latina one more time, and then responded, "Apparently... um... Latina's sister... is mixed in with that group of envoys."

Kenneth and Rita both froze.

They were well aware of the position Latina's sister held.

Latina wouldn't meet the gazes of anyone present. As always, her reactions left her an open book.

"Latina?" Kenneth questioned, causing the girl's shoulders to jump.

"All I know... is that Chrysos is mixed in with the envoy group...?"

"No, you definitely know something."

"It's true... just..."

"'Just'?" Dale pushed, and Latina looked back at him, seeming like she was at a loss.

"I just thought... that Chrysos might be plotting something."

"Well, that's for sure," Dale immediately agreed, causing Kenneth and Rita to make awkward faces. Dale bluntly stated to the two of them, "She's Latina's sister, after all."

"Ah..."

"Well... I guess there's no surprise there, then..."

That fact alone was enough of an answer to satisfy them.

All Sylvia told me... was that Chrysos was coming here, though...

As she thought to herself, she let out a little "Umm..." and tilted her head.

It wasn't as though Latina was hiding anything, as the information she had heard really was just, "the Golden King is heading to Laband." However, it was also true that she had a bad feeling about something.

But... hmm... it couldn't be, right...?

Still, that was ultimately just a sense of foreboding, rather than anything she could be confident of. That was why she hadn't discussed the matter with Dale and the others.

Before long, it had become a hot topic in Laband. This was especially true in Kreuz, which served as a relay point between Vassilios and the capital, Ausblick. Though they would be few in number, the visitors were envoys from a foreign nation that had remained closed off up until now. Kreuz was a town that was very open to visitors, so there were very few negative reactions to the fact that they were members of a different race. On top of that, there were rumors that the ruler of that nation was a beautiful young woman, so it was no surprise that the town was in such a welcoming mood.

Of course, it would be hard to say that all of Laband welcomed the arrival of this group of envoys, or even the idea of a cultural exchange with the country of devils in general. There were so-called "human supremacists" who held prejudiced views regarding other races, as well as a growing fear left in the wake of the damages caused by the Demon Lords of Calamity. Since people didn't know that not all demon lords were alike, many judged them all to be just as awful as the Calamities.

Kreuz could actually be called something of an exception for maintaining a friendly atmosphere in spite of all that.

"Well, the young queen will serve as a pretty easy to understand symbol. Just seeing her should help to change the minds of folks like that."

Apparently soldiers from the capital would be showing up to act as protection when the time came. It was easy to see the narrow-minded sorts who preached human supremacy showing up in Kreuz and doing something extreme, after all.

"Though with that said, I hear this town is apparently the most friendly to devils in all of Laband."

A certain large non-profit organization in Kreuz had a big hand in that. As long as that group held authority within this town, people like that would never be able to cause trouble for their idol's sister.

"So this town is relatively safe for devils..."

"Hold on a second," Dale interjected. He raised his hand to his brow and shook his head, then looked at Latina.

"Latina."

"Yes?"

"Explain."

"I don't really know what to say..." Latina said with a strained smile, tilting her head a little. "You had to go to the capital because the envoys from Vassilios are coming, right...?"

"Yeah."

Dale had spent the last few days away from Kreuz, just as Latina had said. He had expected to be called away for that, but what he hadn't foreseen was a formal request to come back to the capital with Latina when the envoys arrived. As that missive had come from the duke himself, Dale couldn't possibly refuse, no matter how much his jealous side was flaring up.

Dale was called to the capital because this was a visit from a foreign ruler and defense secrets were involved, so a single letter giving him his orders wouldn't cover things. Once all the arrangements were in place, he took the flying dragon prepared for him back to Kreuz.

However, what Dale found waiting for him when he got back home was a situation he had never expected.

"It happened while you were away... I was just doing laundry... and then I sensed her there..."

"What is she doing here?" Dale asked, an exhausted expression on his face.

"I don't know, either..."

Dale's finger was pointing at a woman who looked identical to Latina. It went

without saying, though, that her eyes were golden. She was wearing a very normal Labandese dress, a dark red bolero, and a matching hat.

She turned her focus towards the task of shelling nuts rather than paying him much attention, even after he had interrupted.

“Rita is the one who welcomed her in...”

“I don’t know what to tell you either, though,” Rita responded with a troubled look, despite being the first one to find her. “She just walked in through the front door.”

“Well, I guess she wouldn’t be coming in through the window or anything...”

That really *was* a sudden occurrence.

When the door to the Ocelot swung open, Rita smiled and launched into her usual greeting. “Wel...come...?” Her voice had tapered off like that because the customer looked so similar to a girl she was thoroughly acquainted with, to such a degree that her identity required no explanation. That was also precisely what caused Rita to freeze up.

This customer was someone who would never be in a place like this.

The regulars also realized a second later, causing them to freeze in place. None of them moved a muscle. One of the customers was even so shocked that they dropped their mug.

Kenneth came out of the kitchen with a frown, having heard the crash.

“Just what’s going—?”

And then, Kenneth froze too.

It felt like the very air itself was standing still as everyone was left at a loss as to how to react. Then, a certain pup who had no idea how to read the mood wandered in. He trotted along forwards while paying no attention to those around him, then rubbed his head up against the visitor.

“Been a while.”

“Indeed.”

“Call for Latina?”

“Please do.”

After that brief exchange, Vint turned back around the way he had come. Before long, he returned to the shop with Latina.

Latina was wiping her hands on her apron, looking confused as to why she had been called for. However, her expression soon shifted to surprise when she saw who Vint was heading towards.

As a result, Latina’s hysterical voice ended up reverberating through the Ocelot.

“Chrysos?!”

“Platina!”

Rather than shaking off her twin sister’s affectionate hug or trying to return it, Latina just stood there blinking in amazement.



“That all happened a bit before you came back, Dale.”

“Seriously...?”

Dale had walked through the door before anyone could even grasp what was going on, which only added to the chaos.

Chrysos may not have known what the conversation was about, but she still had a satisfied look on her face, having finished placing all the shelled nuts onto a small plate by her side. She didn't particularly look like she intended to eat any, though. Perhaps since she always had servants handling her every need, the very concept of a nut with a shell was intriguing to her.

“So, why are you here?” Dale asked, having regained a bit of his composure.

Having finished building her mountain of nuts, she looked at him and responded, “Vassilios has long refused contact with the outside world, so misconceptions regarding demon lords and devils have spread amongst the humans, yes?”

“Well, I guess that's true. If you mention demon lords in a human country, everybody will just think of the Calamities. And both devils and demons tend to get lumped together, too.”

“Demons” referred to those who a demon lord granted a portion of their power, making them into retainers. There were few restrictions when it came to becoming one. It wasn't even necessary to be a member of the races of man, as just having some degree of intelligence was enough. But with that said, demon lords came from the race of devils, so the same tended to be true of their retainers.

On top of that, the only real visual identifier of a demon was the “name” that their master branded them with. That name served as a symbol of their ownership and obedience, so it was always placed in a vital position like above their heart or on their forehead. In other words, on a body part they could never get rid of, no matter how much they came to despise the brand.

Dale's divine protection that allowed him to tell them apart was an exception, as differentiating them was nearly impossible for most people. As a result, it wasn't at all rare for humans who were only vaguely familiar with demon lords

and their demons to lump devils in as the same lot.

“One purpose of this visit of mine was to help to correct such misconceptions. I have found, though, that there are indeed some with truly unpleasant manners of thinking.”

“Well, I can’t deny that...”

Humans had the greatest population amongst the seven races by a long shot. That meant that depending on the circumstances, they could live their whole lives never interacting with a member of another race. Or sometimes, it even led to apprehension towards anyone who looked different. So-called human supremacy was blatant discrimination, but it was also hard to say such feelings were rare amongst humans as a whole.

“Such groups do not think fondly of my visit, yes? Some may even try to harm me directly.”

“Yeah, I suppose.”

“Therefore, I have left a double of myself with the envoys and headed off for this town on my own.”

“Right. That definitely is strange,” Dale interjected without even thinking, only for Kenneth and the regulars to nod along.

“That’s right, Chrysos. Even though demon lords can’t be hurt by anyone but heroes, to go off on your own...” A good portion of those present found it strange to see Latina being the one to interject. “And you can’t really take care of yourself on your own, can you...?”

“If you are able to do so, Platina, then I can as well.”

“It’s true that Labandese clothing is easier to wear than the outfits from Vassilios, but... that’s not all there is to it.”

Latina’s interjection strayed off course somewhere along the way, it seemed. And Chrysos’s response also felt unusual somehow.

It was then that Dale suddenly had a thought.

Back in Vassilios, Chrysos’s appearance had been suitable for the ruler of a nation. There had been no doubting that she fit the role. But when she was

removed from her position and placed in an unfamiliar nation, all that was left was an airheaded girl who had grown up secluded from the outside world.

“You two really are a lot alike...”

“Wah?”

“There is no helping the fact that we resemble one another.”

Dale sensed that Latina’s identical twin may have been even more lacking in common sense than she was.

Amidst all this, the other airheaded twin bluntly blurted out, “But still... I don’t think there’s anything we can do now that she’s here, honestly.”

This wasn’t really the sort of thing that could be written off so easily.

Her comment had shocked not just Dale, but also everybody else around.

Latina then continued on with a slightly troubled look on her face, “And there was also something else that had me a little worried...”

“Huh?”

“The food in Vassilios is completely different from the stuff we have here in Laband.”

Latina’s concern was rooted in the truly deplorable culinary state of her sister’s country. It wasn’t particularly surprising just how deeply that had shaken her.

“Latina...”

“Um, so for people coming from Vassilios, the food in Laband should all be completely unfamiliar.”

“Right...”

Unlike Dale, who looked just plain astounded, Kenneth appeared to be thinking things over in response. “So you’re saying the reception for the envoys from Vassilios could end up being a problem, Latina?”

“Yeah. Chrysos had heard from Sylvia that the culinary standards here were different, but... At this rate, manners may not be the only thing that ends up being an issue.”

“I see,” Kenneth nodded in understanding. The others around the two of them weren’t quite as worked up about the matter, though. It wasn’t just Dale, but also Sylvester and Rita, who looked a little astounded at the cooking-obsessed pair.

However, Kenneth shot them back an exceedingly serious look.

“At this rate, it’ll be difficult to welcome the envoys from Vassilios if we don’t handle things real carefully. Right, Latina?”

“Yeah... They don’t have bread in Vassilios. None of them will have ever even seen it before. And when the envoys arrive, regardless of it’s in Kreuz or the capital, there’s sure to be a welcome banquet, right? So will someone have to explain each and every dish to them...?”

“That’d be tough to do in and of itself. They don’t even have a lot of the base ingredients there, do they?”

“They should understand concepts like ‘grain’ and ‘meat’... Put another way, though, that may be *all* they’ll get.”

“Is it really all that tricky of a thing?” Dale asked, tilting his head.

“There was a country I went to before where bugs were a staple food, and a common source of protein. To them, that wasn’t strange in the least, so they brought it on out like normal when entertaining. I didn’t get all worked up over it because I knew of plenty of places where people sometimes eat insects, but it still definitely left a strong impact on me,” Kenneth said, offering a rather blunt example.

If the insect was a large magical beast then there would be many portions that would be considered edible, so it wasn’t all that unheard of. Still, Kenneth preferred to avoid using such ingredients for aesthetic reasons, if nothing else.

“The Akhdar priests with me apparently found the novelty amusing, but still...”

Priests of that god, Latina’s friend included, were rather unflappable due to their personal interest in the unknown.

“You couldn’t say everybody would react that way, right?”

“If you know in advance then you can mentally prepare yourself, though. And I mean, it takes a good bit of guts to head off and dine in a country when you don’t have any idea what the food there will be like. Plus, that’s not even the only cultural difference here.”

Latina looked to be thinking on Kenneth’s words.

“Hey, Chrysos. I remember hearing Rag say that Mov ate more modest meals than the townspeople, but was that really true?”

“Hmm? Mov believed that was the way that a leader should be. I hold the same belief.”

Hearing that reply, Latina turned to Dale with a troubled look on her face.

“Latina?”

“Um... In Laband, a banquet is when you lay out a whole lot of unique, tasty food in front of people, right?”

“Well yeah, that’s just hospitality.”

“In Vassilios... you’re not supposed to lay out so much food that it couldn’t possibly all be eaten...” Latina said, looking at Chrysos.

The young ruler seemed to have finally grown bored of just watching, as she was now chewing on the nuts as she nodded along.

“It is a sin.”

“Is it really that bad?” Dale asked, looking surprised.

“Vassilios is not suited to farming, so we have many problems related to food. If the privileged class were to monopolize the food in order to indulge themselves, the people would starve. That must not be allowed to occur,” Chrysos bluntly responded.

“And also, devils may be alright eating much less than humans... but someone needs still to regulate supplies, right...?”

For a while, silence fell over the Ocelot.

It was an unexpectedly direct example of the issues with intercultural communication.

The one to finally break the silence was Kenneth.

“We’re talking about the duke, so I’m sure he’s received a report and made preparations... But still, it may be a good idea to let him know about Latina’s concerns.”

“Yeah...” Dale replied with a sigh, looking like he just wanted to bury his head in his hands.

Meanwhile, Latina seemed to have shifted moods as she turned to her twin and asked, “So you plan to meet up with the envoys here in Kreuz?”

“That is my intent.”

The information that the envoys would be heading to Kreuz after departing from Vassilios had only just arrived. The procession was to cross the desert that surrounded their nation, and then would have to travel by foot through that magical beast-filled forest. That meant it would still be quite some time before they arrived in Kreuz.

“So where are you going to stay until then?”

“You need not worry about that. There is a manor in this town which I had prepared previously, as a base to use during my search for you.”

“...Huh?”

Latina assumed that the “manor” Chrysos mentioned was the one in the western section of town, where they had been reunited not-so-terribly long ago.

“Even now, it serves as a place used by contacts between this country and my homeland, so it has been maintained. It should not have fallen into disrepair.”

“Um, but, Chrysos... you came alone, didn’t you?”

“Indeed.”

“So how do you plan to take care of yourself...?” Latina asked in a trembling voice.

“If you are able to handle such matters, Platina, then the same must be true for me,” Chrysos responded, overflowing with confidence.

“Kenneth, Mr. Syl, what’ll we do?! Do I need to live there with her for a while?!”

“Calm down, little lady.”

“If you make a careless move, then it’ll attract unnecessary attention.”

Latina hadn’t asked Dale the same question because she knew exactly how he’d react. He’d either adamantly protest to Latina going to live with her sister even for just a little while, or insist that he also be allowed to come along. And if she heard that he was coming along, Chrysos was sure to end up looking utterly disgusted. That reaction would be completely understandable, though, seeing how the couple would surely be all over one another day and night.

Latina was able to calmly assess the situation so well precisely because she knew just what sort of personalities they had.

Kenneth’s concern certainly wasn’t unfounded. Latina’s fame in parts of Kreuz easily exceeded that of even the town’s ruler. If she were to do something out of the ordinary, it would draw no small amount of attention.

“We could get some tight-lipped folks to keep watch over the area...”

“The trick is going to be who we’ll get for inside the manor, possibly to take care of her depending on how things go.”

It made for a strange sight for a bar on the outskirts of town, seeing a discussion being held about the details of how to guard a VIP from a foreign nation. But there were just that many powerful people who gathered in this specific bar, hence the current chaotic state of affairs.

“In that case, I think it might be good to have someone who doesn’t know Chrysos’s background. Her being a devil should be enough to explain how she doesn’t know about Laband... And if they’re not so worried about formalities, then they’ll probably stand out less...”

Everyone was in the midst of that noisy debate when Rita called out, “Ah, welcome.”

The room went silent as everyone turned to look at the entrance.

“Are you in the middle of something?”

Adelina and the other girls seemed displeased to find everyone staring at them.

“...If they’re around my age, they wouldn’t stand out as much when walking around town and stuff, right...?”

“Is that a preamble to her wandering about town?” Kenneth asked.

“Latina’s a bundle of curiosity and they’re sisters... And I mean, if she wasn’t the sort to wander around, she never would’ve done something like this to start with, right?” Dale replied with a defeated look.

“Well, I guess that’s true.”

And so, without them even being given a chance to object, it was decided that the three girls were to be offered up to the aloof demon lord.

†

The characteristic aroma of butter being heated wafted through the air. Latina then nimbly added bread that had soaked in egg yolk to the metal pan. The flame was low, so it cooked slowly.

“Sweets burn easily, so it’s important to manage your flame,” Latina said while using the time it took to heat to quickly prepare plates. She laid them out on top of the table and then placed cups alongside them. Her timing had been spaced out perfectly so that the bread was done cooking just as the pot full of boiling hot water and tea leaves began letting off steam.

When the time was just right, she flipped over the bread, revealing a perfectly grilled surface. It was mouth-watering just to look at, which seemed to make Latina earnestly happy.

“Children tend to like sweets, right? They say that’s because sweetness is the easiest taste for us to comprehend. Bitterness and sourness can bring to mind the flavor of spoiled food, so I think they tend to be more of an acquired taste.”

“Is that how it works...?”

“So I think it’s best to become accustomed to new food by starting with something sweet. I mean, back when I was a kid Kenneth started out by giving me nutritious dishes that were only ever lightly seasoned.”

Latina carried the pan containing the now-finished french toast to the table as she conversed with Dale. The egg had soaked all the way through, leaving the bread sweet and fluffy. It had been one of her favorites ever since she was a child.

“Here’s Emma’s portion. And this is for you, Theo,” she said, leaving a plate in front of each of the siblings. Both of them were now completely attached to her, so they broke out in wide grins at the sight of Latina’s homemade cooking.

“And here’s yours, Chrysos.”

“Alright.”

It looked as if the number of children had suddenly grown by one.

Dale looked at the sight with a lukewarm gaze.

Latina poured out tea from the pot into the cups. There was no plate in front of Dale because he wasn’t all that fond of sweets, but Latina had been sure to prepare a cup for him. But unfortunately, before he could even take a single sip of it, his gaze was stolen away by Latina. She looked happier than anyone else there as she sat down at the table.

“And this is my share.”

“You really do look happy eating that, Latina...”

“It’s out of necessity. If I’m eating it, then Chrysos can eat it too without worrying...” Latina said, sounding like she was grasping for an excuse.

“Indeed,” Chrysos agreed with a nod.

The synchronized way they moved their forks really did bring to mind the fact that they were twins.

“Even if it is something which I have never seen before, if Platina places it before me, there is no way that it could cause me harm.”

“You never change, do you?” Dale quipped, ignoring the fact that he wasn’t really one to talk.

“Still, I thought that if Chrysos felt that way, we may as well use that to our advantage.”

“I guess... I suppose if their ruler is eating away without any hesitation, her subordinates won’t exactly be able to refuse.”

In Vassilios, the demon lord held not only held absolute authority in the political realm, but the religious one as well. If she ordered the envoys to eat blindfolded or even chow down on poison, they would clear their plates with smiles on their faces.

There was no consideration for the rights of the individual when it came to stuff like that.

That having been said, Chrysos’s deep concern for her retainers was well known, so they would know she wasn’t forcing them to do anything unreasonable. She wouldn’t be met with any great opposition.

“And so, my plan is to introduce Chrysos to as many different dishes as I can.”

As Dale and Latina were having that conversation, a plate was thrust in between them by a boy who didn’t know how to read the situation.

“Sis, seconds please.”

“If you eat too much now then you’ll spoil your meal, Theo.”

“Indeed.”

“You need to be careful not to overeat and make yourself sick too, Chrysos.”

Chrysos had been holding her plate out just like the young boy, and had received the same sort of response back from Latina.

“It really is just like we’ve got more kids hanging around the place...”

Dale looked exasperated and gave a sigh as he refilled Emma’s cup with tea. The little girl was happily chewing away at her snack all the while.

“By the way, what ended up happening with Adelina and the others?”

“They’re taking a break in the shop right now,” Latina responded.

Hearing that, Dale moved from the kitchen out into the shop and found Adelina, Paula, and Elvira looking completely and utterly exhausted.

“Um... are you alright...?”

“...Huh? ...Oh... Mr. Dale... Thanks for all the hard work always...”

“Yeah...”

“No matter how I look at it, I’d say you all have been working way harder than I have, actually...”

Dale couldn’t help but give a strained smile at the way that they remained limp while greeting someone who was standing up straight.

“Um, anyway... yeah... Sorry for all the trouble Chrysos is causing you...”

Dale came to the conclusion that since Latina was his fiancée, that made Chrysos a relative. As such, he felt the need to apologize for the source of all their exhaustion.

The three of them looked up at Dale with pitiful looks on their faces.

“I never imagined guard jobs would be this rough...”

“...I think this is probably a whole different beast compared to your average guard job...”

It wasn’t exactly everyday that the ruler of a foreign nation snuck in for a visit, not bringing along even a single servant.

“I mean, with the way she keeps on acting, it’s hard to tell if she has any common sense or not...”

“There seem to be housekeepers who come around and handle housework, but we’ve got no clue as to when they even show up...”

Oh, so there are technically people around from the Vassilios side of things, huh?

Dale couldn’t reveal Chrysos’s background, so he was hesitant to explain that those “housekeepers” may have really been intelligence operatives. However, as the girls were ignorant of the circumstances, it must have seemed truly bizarre to find the housework getting done without them even knowing it.

A single drop of cold sweat ran down Dale’s back. He truly pitied the girls.

“And she seems to act like she finds it totally natural to have people guarding her, only to then wander off on her own without paying us any heed...”

“Last time she suddenly disappeared and we had to hunt her down, we found her crouching down in front of a stray cat... I almost shouted out ‘What’re you, a kid?!’ without even thinking.”

Ah, Latina does that too.

Dale always had to hold Latina’s hand when they were out walking around town so that the bundle of curiosity wouldn’t wander off and get lost at the first sight of something that caught her attention.

“And yet she keeps wanting to go to the less organized, rougher parts of town...”

“We thought we had lost her when we took her to the eastern district, only to find that she had wandered into a workshop and was drinking tea with the owner...”

Their exhaustion was no surprise, all things considered.

Dale had guessed things would turn out like this with Chrysos, prompting an awkward laugh from him. After all, she had behaved much the same way even on her short trip from the Ocelot to that manor where she was now staying.

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Adelina and the others had been half-forced into having to take care of Chrysos, but the ruler herself didn’t appear to give any real thought to the matter.

After all, as the king of Vassilios, it wasn’t as if she knew each of her servants on a first-name basis. Owing to her position, she was simply accustomed to being waited upon by relative strangers.

Meanwhile, the girls also didn’t seem to have any serious questions about Chrysos’s background. Everything she wore was high-class and expensive. That alone was enough to tell them that she had come from an affluent household. Most importantly, though, she was the spitting image of their friend Latina. The fact that the two of them were twin sisters hardly needed pointing out.

“Chrysos, when I saw the place before, I got the impression that it hadn’t been thoroughly cleaned... Do you need any more help?”

“That was because circumstances at the time demanded I move quickly. It was not even originally planned that I would go myself. Therefore, it was reported to me that only the places that would be used were taken care of. That is not the case in this instance, though.”

The way that Latina and Chrysos were happily chatting away in front of the group of three served to further support the assumption that they were related.

“Um... I believe it was this way.”

Worryingly, Chrysos didn't seem to remember exactly where the manor was located in the western district. When Dale pointed that out, Chrysos's cheeks puffed up a little, just like Latina's did when she was upset.

“Would it not be unusual for one to accurately remember the layout of a town that they have visited but once? And I also continuously had guides alongside me at that time.”

As a result, Latina was the one currently leading their party. Following behind were the group of three girls, and even farther back were Dale and Vint. Dale felt strangely confident that even if Latina became uncertain as to where to go, the exceptionally skilled pup would get them through it somehow.

“I think... it should be around here.”

“Hmm... Platina, should we not take that path over there?”

“Ah... Right, this is the way.”

The twin sisters made their way past the high-end residences of the western district in this way, by supplementing each others' memories. At any rate, Dale noticed that the three girls, being mere common citizens, looked like they were feeling terribly ill-at-ease surrounded by so many extravagant manors. The place just had a totally different feel to it compared to the southern and eastern districts where commoners lived.

Before long Latina stopped in front of one of the residences, looking relieved.

“Thank goodness we were able to remember...”

“Indeed,” Chrysos agreed with a composed nod, and then entered through the gate to the manor without any hesitation. She pulled an elegant key out of

thin air and inserted it into the door's lock. And then, she tilted her head.

"...Hmm?"

"Um, you have to *turn* keys to use them," Latina gently pointed out, quickly realizing her sister's mistake.

Structures in Vassilios were rarely built with doors, so Chrysos had no experience with locks in her everyday life. Latina had offered advice because she was aware of that, but hearing that caused the expressions of the three girls behind her to freeze. They seemed to take it as a sign that Chrysos was even more ignorant of the ways of the world than they had expected.

As the heavy single door swung open, the stuffy air characteristic of closed-off rooms came rushing out. It wasn't dusty in the least, though, causing Latina to breathe a sigh of relief.

"So it was true... In that case, I suppose it won't need much cleaning after all."

It seemed she still hadn't entirely discarded the possibility of her doing some cleaning.

"The room that I shall use is on the upper floor, in the center. The parlor and kitchen meant for guests, as well as the rooms for servants, are on the first floor. You all may use them as you please," Chrysos briefly instructed the three girls while giving them a fleeting glance. They were guards rather than visitors, so the guest rooms weren't open to them. And besides, they were terrified of the thought of getting even a single scratch on the furnishings in a ritzy place like this. The absence of such an offer actually left them relieved rather than disappointed.

"Do you intend to stay the night, Latina?"

"If I do, then I'll miss out on work tonight and tomorrow morning." Latina's workaholic nature led to a prompt rejection of her sister's proposal.

Latina wandered around, looking at everything with great interest. Before long, she turned around and called out to Chrysos, unable to hold back any longer.

"Hey, Chrysos, is it alright if I look at the other rooms?"

“Do as you wish.”

“Adelina, do you all want to come with me...? Since you can’t take your eyes off your client, you need to know the whole layout of the house in order to do a proper job, right?”

Hearing that, the three girls hurriedly stood up. After seeing them off, Dale called out to Chrysos while watching Vint make himself at home.

“The plan is to have some trustworthy folks keep an eye on the area surrounding this manor, so feel free to ask for help if anything happens. In fact, they’ll lend you a hand even with simple things like directions or finding somewhere to buy food, not just stuff strictly related to security...”

“Hmph.”

“On the off chance that something happens to you, Latina would be sad. And I’d like to avoid the blow that’d deal to relations with Vassilios, too.”

“There is no way that I would do something that would upset Platina,” Chrysos said, puffing up her slight chest with pride, causing Dale to break out in a strained smile.

On that single point, Chrysos and Dale were in complete agreement. The reception room they were in was furnished with luxurious furniture, and was completely in the Labandese style. Chrysos sat down on the sofa there just as naturally as she did in Vassilios.

The way that she didn’t even so much as offer him a seat was the norm, so Dale paid that fact no heed and simply stood there quietly as he waited.

Before too terribly long, Latina returned. The other three girls were apparently still wandering about figuring out the layout of the place. Latina had come back alone, and was tilting her head a bit.

“Latina?”

“Hmm?”

“What’s up?”

“It’s nothing...”

She stood there for a while longer with her head tilted, and then decided to tell Dale what she had realized.

“There’s also the matter of the cleaning, but... it looks like people have been coming and going here.”

“Well, yeah, but... Why do you think that?”

“We went to go check out the kitchen, for example, and even little things like soap were properly prepared. Chrysos would never pay attention to stuff like that herself. And also...” Latina stopped for a second, looking like she was finding it hard to say. “In the kitchen... there was food... from Vassilios... and it looked to be fresh...”

“Hey, don’t make that face... I mean, food from back home is best... Or, well, even if it’s not the best, you’re at least used to it, right?”

He spotted a pained look in her expression that he never wanted to see, and wasn’t able to hold himself back from making a strained smile.

Latina suddenly regained her composure and turned to face her sister, who was still relaxing on the sofa.

“Chrysos, come to the Ocelot for a meal whenever you want, alright?”

“Hmm?”

“I always make Dale’s portion, and I’ll do the same for you... So let’s eat together,” Latina said, desperately trying to persuade her sister.

“Right,” Chrysos responded, none too concerned in comparison to her twin.

There was a reason behind Latina’s desperation. Latina would never accomplish her goal of getting her sister accustomed to Labandese food if Chrysos just kept on eating Vassilios-style meals even after coming all this way.

And Latina also had a further wish beyond that: For the exchange between Vassilios and Laband to lead to the improvement of her old home’s culinary culture. Since her sister was the nation’s ruler, this visit made for an unparalleled opportunity to advance that goal.

As someone who had grown up in a foreign nation and gained a different point of view as a result, Latina found the state of cuisine in her old home

country bad enough to make her want to cry.

“Let’s eat all kinds of tasty foods together, alright?!”

“Hmm?”

Latina was filled with determination to at least make sure her precious other half was exposed to deliciousness while she was here in this country.

And so, that was how Chrysos’s stay in Laband started.

That was how things went immediately after her arrival, setting a level of expectations for how things would proceed.

As Latina was unreserved around her sister and Dale was also his usual deplorable self with Chrysos, there was nobody around to really call her out for her actions. In addition, she had no real self-restraint in the first place. To top it all off, sadly, Adelina and the others just weren’t experienced enough to handle the task of reigning her in.

“Ah... Well, at least when she’s in the shop, I’ll take care of her... So go ahead and rest up properly now, alright?”

“We’ll take you up on that...”

“Yeah, we will...”

“Yup...”

As Dale looked at the three dead-tired girls, he thought to himself that they seemed more like babysitters than bodyguards.

Chrysos took a fleeting glance at Dale as he returned to the kitchen, and then said without any hesitation, “I wish to use this opportunity to see things that I would normally not, as one who was invited as a guest of the nation.”

“...How has that been working out?”

“I have seen many interesting things, from your technology to your culture. Everything I see is so very amusing. At the same time it is also a useful opportunity, to determine what things exist only in my own nation.”

Latina tilted her head a bit.

“The magic techniques really are amazing, aren’t they? Rag always seemed to

do everything so easily back then...”

“Platina... Rag was a foremost user of magic amongst those of our nation.”

Dale figured from that response that Latina’s “common sense” really didn’t match up with that of Vassilios at large after all.

“With that said, it appears to be true that our nation is superior in terms of magical theory. We also appear to possess unique techniques in terms of processing ores and minerals.”

“I’ve actually got some interest in that myself.”

“That is how one begins trading, yes?” Chrysos said with a smile. The look on her face really was that of the ruler of a nation, one who stood above others.

But well, that was indeed what she was.

“Still, you should try not to overwork the girls too much.”

“They have been of great use as guides. I am unfamiliar with the layout of this town, after all. Though to speak earnestly, I would prefer those who were more familiar with economics and distribution...”

“You should invite some scholars for that when you come as an official guest of the nation.”

“Neither Chrysos nor I face any great threat from anyone but a hero, now... There aren’t any other demon lords right now, after all. And I mean, you may complain about Chrysos an awful lot, but I can’t imagine you’d ever harm her, right?”

Latina looked at Dale with pure trust in her eyes, and though he felt embarrassed, he couldn’t deny what she had said.

“Ugh...”

“So normally, there wouldn’t be any need for either of us to have bodyguards...”

“Um, Latina, you should think a little bit more about the influence you possess,” Dale interjected with a sigh.

“Huh?” Latina tilted her head, looking confused.

It was true that their lives wouldn't be endangered.

Even ignoring the fact that Chrysos was a demon lord, nobody in this town would ever lay a hand on someone with such a clear connection to the Fairy Princess. That was in a large part due to how many members of a certain organization there were scattered about town.

Even now, there was something akin to bloodlust emanating from the regulars seated in the Ocelot while they stared into the kitchen. That was where their beloved Fairy Princess and her identical twin currently were. And because they were aware of Chrysos's background, they knew that if they let this chance slip them by, they may well never be able to gaze upon this lovely, precious sight of the two twins together.

Besides, since she had the same face as his adorable Latina, Dale was also ready in the depths of his heart to forgive anything she did. In that matter, he truly was beyond redemption.

As for the "bloodlust" from the regulars, it was directed at Dale for hoarding the twins all to himself. The easy-going twins were completely oblivious, though, prompting another sigh from Dale.

"We're talking about Sis though, so no helping that..." Theo said with a knowing look.

"No helpin'?"

Theo nodded back at his sister.

†

Once she had more or less had her fill of sightseeing in Kreuz, Chrysos expressed interest in visiting her father's grave (though there was still time before the envoys arrived).

"Well, I'd expected that this was coming..."

"I'll go along, too. There's some things I want to tell Rag, after all," Latina said. Chrysos's own expression displayed no surprise.

"Should Paula and the girls... stay behind?"

"Maybe Chrysos and I should just talk in the devil language... but I'd feel like

we were keeping secrets from you, Dale.”

“That *would* be a little miserable.”

In the end, it was decided that the group of three girls would be left behind in Kreuz.

They couldn't reveal Chrysos's background, and Dale had no confidence that he'd be able to cover properly for their inattentiveness. There was also the risk that in front of their father's grave, the twins would reminisce even more than usual and let some secrets slip.

That... may have actually been one of the reasons Chrysos came alone...

Dale recalled that back when she was in Vassilios being waited upon by her ladies-in-waiting, the First Demon Lord always remained a professional. Perhaps she wanted to be able to simply reminisce with Latina about their father without any reservations, sister to sister.

Well, still... Most folks wouldn't actually come on their own...

As he thought to himself, Dale set about checking his equipment. Though with that said, he was just clad in his usual attire of a black magic beast leather coat with a gauntlet on his left hand and a sword at his hip. He had none of the sort of camping gear he had brought the other day.

When he went downstairs and headed into the shop, he found Latina and Chrysos having a friendly chat over some tea.

Latina was wearing sturdy boots on her feet and, unusually for her, had on long pants. She had on a shoulder bag in order to keep her hands free, and a knife held in a red leather scabbard at her hip. Combined with the way that her hair was done up, she was giving off a rather outdoorsy impression.

Meanwhile, Chrysos had on the crimson bolero, hat, and dress that she had been wearing when she first came to the Ocelot. It was an appealing outfit, but it didn't give off the full-on femininity of Latina's usual fashion. She also had a long walking stick on her, perhaps in place of the scepter she usually carried around in Vassilios.

The old-timers watching the proceedings seemed to enjoy seeing the identical

sisters sporting such a different look from usual. Meanwhile, Vint was standing at their feet, wagging his tail.

Kenneth spotted Dale and called out in a half-astounded voice, “There may not be any need to worry, but... Still, don’t let your guard down.”

“Honestly, I may not even have anything to do...”

Dale alone was more than enough to handle any combat situation. And then on top of that, there were the two sisters with their own specialties as magic users. Latina excelled in fine mana control, while Chrysos was born with a great deal of mana and possessed the skill needed to wield it. Finally, they had a mythical beast capable of carrying his own weight as a member of their party.

Together, they were a group that would easily match any typical adventurers.

“Let’s get going,” Latina said with a smile, betraying not a hint of tension.

She’d been the same way on their trip of just a few days ago. It seemed she really didn’t feel endangered in the least, even when heading into a magical beast habitat. Latina looked to be in a truly good mood as she waved to the regulars and left the Dancing Ocelot.

Dale took the lead, while Latina and Chrysos walked side-by-side a little behind him. He wanted to walk alongside her too, but he knew that it would just turn into a competition with Chrysos. And besides, it’d actually be bad for his heart if she betrayed his expectations and walked a bit removed from the two of them, as he’d be left constantly worrying that her curiosity would get the better of her and she’d wander off. So in the end, the twins ended up in the center of the group, with Dale taking the lead while the faithful pup took up the rear.

“The forest isn’t too far, so we should be able to make the round trip within a day. A lot of folks would still bring camping gear just to be safe, but... we’ve got Vint with us this time, so we should be fine traveling light.”

“Right.”

“Indeed.”

There was a real danger of ending up lost in the forest, which could prove

disastrous. However, Dale would never lose his way due to the Earth magic he was blessed with, and on top of that Vint could also search someone out over a vast, wide range. This group had no need to worry about playing things by the book.

For a few days now the weather had been rather comfortable, so much so that Dale could feel the warmth of the sun even through his black coat. Latina was apparently worried that it still may feel chilly in comparison to the arid climate of Vassilios, as she gave her sister a concerned look.

“Are you alright, Chrysos? You’re not too cold, are you?”

“Hmm? This much is no issue.”

“You spend most of your time in the temple, don’t you? You shouldn’t have much experience with going outside like this, right? Take care that you don’t fall ill, alright?”

“Do you not think that it is precisely because of the fact that I spend all my time in the temple that I must not let such things prevent me from enjoying this sense of freedom, from being outside?”

Hearing Chrysos’s voice from behind him, Dale gave a strained smile. Latina was in high spirits as always, but Chrysos wasn’t falling behind her in the least.

“Just don’t push yourself, and be sure to let me know if you feel off. I can use Earth healing magic, and if it comes down to it Vint can carry you.”

“Woof.”

Vint may have still been a pup, but he was more than capable of easily carrying a full-grown woman.

“What about yourself? With my magic, I can raise or lower the temperature around you freely.”

“I’m used to it, so don’t worry about me. And anyway, I could easily imagine you going ahead and freezing me in the confusion.”

Chrysos just smiled back in response to Dale’s statement. She made the wise choice not to foolishly affirm that suspicion, as doing so would run the risk of making Latina seriously angry.

Despite the time of year, not many leaves had fallen in the forest, leaving the trees all around quite dense. The warm sunlight was blocked before it could reach the ground, so the place was dimly lit even though it was mid-day.

Chrysos surveyed her surroundings and gave a single nod.

“I had heard this place possessed the blessings of Quirmizi and Azraq, as well as Akhdar, but still...”

“Is that so?” Latina asked, tilting her head.

“It’s not quite the sort of place we’d consider sacred land, but yeah. It’s something common to the locations where magical beasts live.”

“They also frequently settle in places that are difficult to cultivate. As human settlements are sparse, the number of magical beasts grows great, in turn only further discouraging settlement.”

“And then when the vegetation grows out of control, you end up with a place like this forest. I imagine these factors will all make it difficult to carve a path through here...”

“It may be difficult, but we shall see it done. It is not a foolish, prideful plan such as converting this whole forest into a settlement, so we should be able to succeed one way or another.”

Dale couldn’t help but feel a little impressed by the level of confidence Chrysos displayed. She was always facing forwards, never looking back, as if her eyes were fixed on the future she desired. She must have had clear plans laid out for how things should progress.

The thought left Dale feeling a little embarrassed, so he glanced up into the sky.

After they stepped into the forest, they took a slightly different route than the one they had taken during their last visit. Latina didn’t notice at first, but as she realized how unfamiliar her surroundings were, she began to suspect it.

She poked gently at Dale’s back and called out, “Dale? Are we... taking a different way than last time?”

“Oh, so you noticed? We’re just taking a brief detour. When I heard you

rustling around this morning, that was you preparing lunch, right? So I wanted to at least find a little clearing where we can take a break.”

Apparently his words had hit the mark, judging by the way that Latina held her bag with a smile.

Before long, their field of vision opened up and they found themselves in a space with a clear stream running through it.

Vint went running off into the water, looking as if he had found some new toy to play with. He ran all about while wagging his tail, kicking up water from the shallow stream as he went.

“Ugh... well, there goes that. And it would’ve been pretty easy to catch fish here, too...”

After that big of a splash, there was no way there’d be any fish hanging around. Wearing a calm expression on her face, Latina gently wrapped her arm around Dale’s as she watched Vint play.

“Latina?”

“...This is the place where you first found me, isn’t it?” Latina said, her smile displaying a complexity of emotion. Upon seeing her face, Dale put his arm around her and brought her in closer.

“Are you sure this isn’t where *you* found *me*? I mean, you’re the one who spotted and approached me back then.”

“That was... because you said it would be alright to come to your side.”

“It would be pretty normal to be too scared to approach some stranger with a sword. I really do think that you taking that step forward is the reason we met.”

“Dale...”

Chrysos’s gaze remained fixed on the pair, who had drifted off into their own little world in no time at all.

“Split apart,” Vint muttered to himself, temporarily halting his frolicking.

Chrysos gave a brief order to the pup, spinning her walking stick around all the while.

“Vint, are you able to send water flying at the two of them?”

“Can send lots, with Wind magic.”

“Alright, then proceed.”

Immediately afterwards an incredibly localized blizzard kicked up, physically causing that lovey-dovey warmth that cared not for place or time to suddenly plummet in temperature.

When the blizzard abated, it became apparent that his instincts as a hero (albeit a deplorable one) had kicked in. Pure white ice clung to his black coat, but he had apparently succeeded in using it to cover Latina. It seemed that Latina had made it through the blizzard without weathering the storm directly, ending up with only a bit of snow atop her head.



Owing to the platinum hue of Latina's hair, the snow on top of Dale's black hair stood out far more in comparison.

They both opened their mouths to say something, but before they could do so, Chrysos said in a disappointed tone, "Are you not aware of the phrase, 'there is a time and a place for everything?'"

With that, Latina seemed to realize the two of them had gone off into their own little world, causing her to look down at the ground and say, "Sorry..."

"It's *always* the time and place for Latina and I to flirt."

Dale, however, remained unrepentant.

"Woof!"

Dale didn't falter in the least, despite not only Chrysos but also the pup looking at him with eyes that said they found his open shamelessness to be truly deplorable.

In a certain way, though, the stare down between Dale and Chrysos was simply business as usual.

Latina's downhearted expression softened a little as she watched this exchange.

"Dale, Chrysos, how about you stop fighting so we can have lunch?"

"Meat," Vint immediately responded, wagging his tail and rubbing his head up against Latina.

It was then that the other two finally realized: Vint was running all around Latina, like it was totally natural. That loyal pup was monopolizing that position by Latina's side.

The girl with the sister complex and the doting idiot drooped their shoulders in tandem, then sat down awkwardly close side-by-side. These two really did think identically, choosing to sit across from Latina at the exact same time.

"I just made some simple boxed lunches."

"Meat?"

"I have some for you, Vint. It may only be enough to qualify as a snack,

though,” Latina said, spreading out what looked like slices of ham from a package. Since she had prepared it for Vint, she specifically hadn’t added salt.

Afterwards, Latina pulled out several more packages from her shoulder bag. It really did feel like they were having a picnic, no matter how you looked at it. That image was only strengthened when she began pouring cold water from a canteen-shaped magical device into cups.

“I knew you had gotten up early this morning, but still...”

“I was just enjoying myself so much that I ended up really getting into it. We’ll have less to carry on the way back, so it should be fine, right?” Latina said with a smile, handing Dale the heaviest of the packages with both hands. The other two were at least a size smaller.

Chrysos, meanwhile, was busy examining the canteen Latina had used with great interest.

Chrysos and Latina differed not only on the amount of mana they possessed, but also the attributes they had affinity for. As a result, Chrysos knew better than anyone else that her sister was unable to use Water magic.

“...It certainly is impressive, even for those who lack the affinity or even the ability to use magic in the first place to be able to employ Water magic.”

“Well, it still only lets you bring forth water. And there’s a limit to the number of times you can use it, so you need to replace it every now and then.”

“Still, it is a great thing, not needing to transport drinking water. Even amongst our devil race, there is no guarantee that one will be able to use Water magic... But would different issues arise as such things spread...?” Chrysos muttered, absorbed in her own thoughts.

Latina gave a strained smile, opening her own lunch. The vegetable and meat packed sandwich was soon visible from within the paper wrapped around it.

“Our portion is smaller than Dale’s, but I also brought some baked sweets for after the meal.”

“Right.”

“Still, you sure did go all out with the fillings, huh?”

“I really got into it.”

“It looks real tasty...”

It was a harmonious, lively mealtime.

Latina had carefully drained the water off the fresh vegetables, then marinated and salted them. They served the role of a sauce, bringing the flavor of the whole dish together. And despite the amount used, it still went down smooth. At first she had planned on just using smoked meat, but apparently she ended up deciding to add grilled chicken, too. And the fragrance of the herbs and juices from the meat only added to the deliciousness. Dale couldn't help but break out in a bit of a strained smile when he thought about how much effort Latina had clearly poured into preparing the food.

Still, it sure is tasty... Dale thought to himself, having already eaten half of it. He then licked up the sauce lingering around his mouth, then lifted up his gauntlet on his left hand.

With only a quick glance to the side, he fired off two mana arrows.

Then, his gauntlet casually moved back to where it had been, and he resumed eating as if nothing had happened.

Vint turned and headed off in the direction Dale's arrows had flown, his tail wagging as he went.

All the while, Latina and Chrysos carried on with a calm, gentle conversation, not noticing Dale and Vint's actions. Their point of discussion had turned to the box of sweets Latina had brought along.

“Latina, what is that?” Dale pointed and asked.

“It's made by baking fruit compote into batter. That cuts the sweetness of the batter, but... it may still be too sweet for you, Dale,” Latina explained, picking up the sweet Dale had pointed out.

“I see.”

“This one is made with dried fruit so it's only as sweet as that usually is, which means you should be alright with it.”

“Right.”

“You two truly do not back down in your clinginess, do you?” Chrysos said while chewing on the sweet she held in both hands, her gaze fixed on the passionate pair.

“Hmm?”

Latina tilted her head.

In Latina’s mind they were acting totally normally, but Chrysos could see that they were already in full-on lovey-dovey mode.

Vint was now diligently grooming himself, having returned at some point. He had a look about him that said he now boasted a full stomach, but rather than commenting on that, Dale simply tossed the dried fruit sweet Latina had handed him into his mouth.

A large, pure white stone stood silently not far from the stream.

Dale thought to himself that the presence of a source of water nearby must have been a big reason Latina had been able to survive despite being so young when she was parted from her father. Since she could only use Holy and Dark magic, she wasn’t able to magically procure drinking water. And no matter how hardy the race of devils may be, they could still die of thirst.

Plus, thanks to the great utility of Holy healing magic, even a young child like Latina could use it to deal with problems that arose, at least to some degree.

Thinking on it, that man had sought to find a way to save his daughter up until the very end, even as he sensed his own death approaching due to illness. Dale thought that must have just been the sort of man he had been.

“...Your father was an amazing man, wasn’t he?”

“Yeah...”

“Naturally.”

The gravestone had been cleaned not too long ago, but it was already covered in dead grass and dirt, likely carried in by a parched wind. Dale started to gather up the grass, figuring it wouldn’t take as long as last time. Then, he used simple Water magic to wash the stone clean.

“While we’re at it, Vint, go ahead and gather up all the grass from the area.

You can do that, right?”

“Woof.”

When it came to Wind magic, this pup had earned his father’s seal of approval.

Having roughly finished cleaning, Dale turned around to call out to Latina and Chrysos... only for his voice to get caught in his throat.

Chrysos was standing up in a dignified manner, and had started to sing. A little afterwards, Latina joined in reciting similar sounding words, though more awkwardly than her sister.

The song was in the devil language, so Dale wasn’t able to pick up all the meaning of the lyrics. But as a priest of Quirmizi, he could sense that it was some form of ritual.

Right... Neither of them are priestesses, but they were born and raised in a temple...

It wouldn’t be strange at all for them to be intimately familiar with etiquette and rituals and the like. It was just that since Banafsaj wasn’t a god worshiped much in human towns, Dale wasn’t familiar with such rituals. This was actually his first time seeing it.

Even so, he could tell this song was meant to grieve for the dead, and to pray that they rest in peace.

Even after that song of prayer ended, the sisters remained close together, not lifting their faces. Before long, though, they did look up. It just looked natural for the two of them to be holding hands, as they were always doing so. It really was easy to imagine them always being together like this, back when they were young.

Dale simply watched over them for a while, but he was the one to eventually break the silence.

“Hey, Chrysos...” That was because a certain question had come to mind. “Should we have him buried in a proper grave, instead of here in this forest? If you want to bring him back to Vassilios, I’ll help to make sure things go

smoothly.”

“Hmm...”

Chrysos seemed to be thinking.

Dale then looked at that beloved girl by her side, and voiced a matter he had hidden up until now.

“And... there’s that matter of the priestess of Banafsaj who served the Second Demon Lord... That was your mother, right? It’ll be necessary to make arrangements to have her body delivered to Vassilios too, won’t it?” Chrysos already knew, but Latina surprisingly didn’t seem to be visibly shaken, either. “Latina...” Dale started, his voice filled with guilt.

“I already learned that Mov has passed from this world... back when we were in Vassilios...” Latina responded with a slightly strained smile. “You met her, didn’t you, Dale?”

“...Yeah.”

“She sure was beautiful, wasn’t she?”

Dale hadn’t expected Latina to respond that way at all. He was frankly a little dumbfounded.

Meanwhile, Latina and Chrysos exchanged sad, lonely smiles.

“Rag always used to say we looked like Mov, didn’t he?”

“Indeed he did.”

“I was a little worried if I’d grow up to be as pretty as her.”

“She was a strong person as well. As a ruler, I wish to strive my hardest so as not to sully Mov’s name.”

“Rag and Mov... I feel like I still have a long ways to go till I catch up to them.”

“I feel much the same.”

Dale felt relieved, hearing their conversation.

Though they mourned the loss of their parents, having someone to share memories with helped greatly.

Still, though... it's a little disappointing that I'm not the one supporting Latina... Dale thought to himself. He was just a bit jealous that those two had spent time together that he wasn't a part of and knew nothing about. *But... there's probably a lot of stuff that those sisters only made it through because they had each other...*

Their deep feelings towards their parents could be seen not in just the girls' prayers for the repose of their souls, but also in the way that they reminisced. Dale could tell just from looking at them that those weren't all bitter memories, too. There was a calm, gentle air about them as they talked.



Normally Vint would just shove his way in as he pleased, but he apparently sensed that now wasn't the time for that, as he had stretched himself out and was simply waiting. Still, from the way that his ears occasionally twitched, it was clear that he was keeping watch over their surroundings. Even from Dale's point of view, the loyal pup was more than carrying out his role as a guard dog.

There was no danger to Latina and Chrysos, even in a magical beast habitat such as this.

"Chrysos, Mov and Rag... They both cared about us an awful lot, didn't they?"

"Indeed."

"Considering Mov's position, it wouldn't have been strange for it to be a political marriage, but... they never seemed that way to me."

"I wasn't able to ever ever ask her directly, but from what I heard from others... apparently Mov was the one who fell for Rag."

"I see..."

Their conversation suddenly stopped there. After both being lost in thought for a while, they opened their mouths in sync, as if they had planned it out in advance.

"Hey, Chrysos."

"Yes?"

"About Mov and Rag..."

"I have thought it through as well."

"Right."

Apparently, the twins had reached an understanding with just that brief exchange. They gripped their held hands tighter, and smiled at one another.

He knew it wasn't the time to be saying such things, but Dale felt a little jealous of their relationship. And to be brutally honest, he felt a bit frustrated.

Dale was a man who didn't waver on such matters.

Chrysos turned to face him, a gentle look in her eyes.

“I was thinking of constructing a mausoleum on this land and interring Rag there. And I would like to do the same for Mov.”

“Is this place really alright? You don’t want to bring them back home...?” Dale asked.

“Um, Mov was a member of the clergy, but Rag wasn’t. In Vassilios... a powerful priestess like Mov would be buried in the temple’s graveyard. Rag couldn’t be buried there, though,” Latina added.

“I would at least like them to be together from now on... I realize that may be mere sentimentality from those of us left behind, though.”

Dale didn’t have anything else to say, having heard how they felt.

“Well then, I’ll try to help make sure everything goes smoothly, too.”

“Right. Thanks, Dale,” Latina said with a smile. By her side, Chrysos wore a gentle expression similar to her sister’s. It was a real rarity for her to direct such a look towards Dale.

“I was thinking that once Rag’s mausoleum is constructed, it would also be good to have the highway between Vassilios and Laband pass alongside it.”

“Ah...”

It would be diverting the path a bit from the shortest distance between the two nations, but not enough to make for a large detour.

They would need a facility to maintain a highway through this land, so some structures would need to be built regardless.

“Rag and Mov... They were both very curious people, who enjoyed learning new things. I think that they would prefer being able to watch over a great many people in a place between Vassilios and the town that is Platina’s other home, rather than being buried in some corner of their native land.”

“They were both beloved by a lot of people... It would be nice if the people who came to remember them kept on going and visited Laband, and relations between the countries advanced.”

The two sisters imagined that sight, which they would hopefully see for real in the not-too-distant future. The smiles they shared gave off a similar impression,

going beyond just their identical appearances.

That gentle, solemn time...

“Bam!”

Came to an end with a certain pup getting bored and ramming into the back of Dale’s legs.

“Hey...! Read the mood a little...!”

Even though it was a sudden, close range attack, Dale just barely managed to dodge it and avoid falling over. However, Vint seemed to take that as a sign that he was up for playing and launched another attack.

“I said cut it out!”

“Woof!”

“Are you really alright, Platina, being with fools like that?” Chrysos asked, glaring at the squabbling pair with a cold look in her eyes.

“Dale’s the one for me, after all,” Latina responded, looking at them with a smile. And then, she turned and faced the pure white gravestone and said in the devil tongue, *“I’m really happy now, just like you wished back then... I found happiness.”*

Hearing her sister’s report to their departed father, Chrysos added in a somewhat blunt voice, *“Just finding happiness is not enough. After what we’ve been through, I think we’re owed more than that.”*

“I suppose we are demon lords, aren’t we? Is it alright to be a little selfish, do you think?”

“Of course.”

Both of them broke out in smiles at the same time.

“I am glad that you’re here, Chrysos... Ryso.”

“I am as well... Latina.”

Then, they turned to smile at the pure white gravestone one more time, then left the place.

4: Sequel Extra Chapter: A Snowy Day, and Memories of the Little Girl, as well as her Time with the Golden-Eyed Maiden

Snow fell upon the town of Kreuz during Chrysos's visit.

Usually such weather occurred earlier in the year, making this an out of season snowfall. Figuring that Chrysos most likely hadn't prepared any outfits for the weather, Latina grabbed some of her own to share and then ran over to the manor where her sister was staying. Well, to be more accurate, Vint was the one who ran, while Latina followed steadily along behind him.

The road was slick with snow, making it easy to slip. If she rushed too much, she'd only end up taking a tumble and falling on her backside. Latina knew that well, as she had many painful, chilly memories of such occurrences.

In accordance with her tastes, Latina's clothes were feminine and cute. Once Chrysos put on the fluffy knitted garments from Latina, they made for an even more adorable pair of twins than usual. Since the Golden King had been born and raised in the hot climate of Vassilios, this sudden cold snap must have been hard on her. When Chrysos arrived at the Dancing Ocelot, clad in a knitted hat and scarf, she looked just like a pink little lamb.

"Kreuz doesn't get as much snow as the rest of Laband, and it usually only amounts to a light dusting in the end... It's certainly been a while since we've gotten this much," Latina said, sitting down next to her twin who was staring out the window. She placed the cups she was holding in front of herself and Chrysos. At a glance it appeared to contain a deep red wine, but it was actually a warm, sweet beverage made from fruit juice, spice, and sugar.

After blowing on it, Latina took a sip.

The recipe for mulled wine came directly from Kenneth, and Latina always made it when winter rolled around. Originally, she had learned it to help Dale warm up when he came home chilled to the bone, but now that she was an

adult, she had developed a taste for it herself. That said, Latina wasn't exactly a strong drinker, so a single sip of most alcoholic beverages was enough to turn her beet red. As such, when she made some for herself, she made sure it was real light on alcoholic content.

Chrysos didn't seem to be paying much attention to what Latina was saying, as she was fixated on the view out the window. Between that and how cold Latina looked as she sipped her mulled wine, it seemed they must have taken quite a detour on the way here from the western district. It really was rather apparent just what had happened.

Dale stared at the two of them with a smile, nostalgically recalling the past.

"Latina got really excited when she first saw snow, too."

"I mean, I'd never had a chance to see it in Vassilios."

"Yeah, I guess that's true..." Dale agreed with a nod. Now that he had seen the arid land surrounding the nation, he definitely understood that.

The first snow of the year that Latina arrived in Kreuz had just barely provided a thin white coating over town, but that was still enough to get the young girl all worked up for the entire day. In her excitement she was practically glued to the window, and even opened it a number of times in spite of the customers' complaints.

Dale was unable to just sit there and watch, so he ended up taking her outside before long. It didn't take much time for Latina to fling off the hood she had on, feeling like it was just getting in the way. And then she just looked up at the grey sky and the snow fluttering down from it, never tiring of the sight.

Dale may have always pampered her, but even he couldn't help but be a little astounded as he kept having to roughly wipe the light coating of snow off of her platinum hair as they walked all over town. If he kept letting her do as she pleased, she would end up catching a cold. Dale ended up bringing Latina back inside the Ocelot, even though she seemed like she hadn't had her fill yet. Kenneth had apparently foreseen all this and prepared a bath, which Latina soon found herself thrown into.

Latina hadn't been so excited in a while, but Dale knew full well that the

chance to see the town in a different light was something that was sure to capture her attention. Still, since she was faced with a twin sister even more worked up than she was, Latina maintained a composed expression. He understood the way she felt, too, and couldn't hold himself back from breaking out into a smile, so he slowly turned to the side and waited for it to pass.

"This may really pile up by the time tomorrow rolls around."

"Such things can happen?"

"Yeah. It looks like it'll at least be enough for the kids to play around in it... Still, you have to be careful walking around when there's snow on the ground. Chrysos, it may be best not to go out tomorrow if you can help it..."

"There is simply no way I would comply with such advice," Chrysos replied, firmly shooting down the suggestion.

"Wah?"

Latina looked dumbfounded. Dale, meanwhile, was staring at her with an astonished expression.

"Should you really be saying that? I mean, you never were the type to just obediently sit around, were you?"

"Yeah."

"That's for sure."

The way that the owners of the Ocelot immediately agreed with him caused Latina to puff up her cheeks a bit. It seemed she had wanted to look at least a little mature in front of her sister.

"Still, it would probably be best to head back to the western district sooner rather than later. It really does seem like it's going to pile up, after all."

Dale grew up in a snowy land, so this wasn't all that much for him. But he knew that since Chrysos wasn't accustomed to it, even just walking could prove troublesome.

"I'm sure Adelina and the girls will shovel the snow, but still..."

"Shall I stay here for the night?" Chrysos bluntly interjected.

“Huh?”

“Wah?”

Chrysos immediately turned to Kenneth and started negotiations.

“I may be a relative of Platina’s, but I do not mind if you ask that I pay the standard fee. Do you have any open rooms?”

“Ah...”

Apparently even Kenneth hadn’t predicted this turn of events. His eyes started to unconsciously wander in response to Chrysos’s question.

Even if Chrysos said she didn’t mind, this wasn’t the sort of inn that was equipped to put up the ruler of a nation. And more importantly, he didn’t think there was any way whatsoever that it’d be acceptable to have the sister of the regulars’ beloved Fairy Princess stay on the same floor as all the regular customers.

Besides, it wasn’t as if he could just toss out all of their other customers, especially in this weather.

“Chrysos...”

“What is it?”

“Do you want to use my room?” Dale offered, feeling a need to do something about the situation. Chrysos instinctively wore a look of disgust. Dale’s room would have to refer to the one that he was all over Latina in, day in and day out. Perhaps the Golden King’s reaction was only natural.

“If you take it, you’ll be able to spend the night with Latina.”

“Indeed.”

That single comment, though, was enough to turn Chrysos’s feelings on the matter right around.

Upon seeing her sister’s reaction, Latina silently stood up from her chair. Seeing how she headed into the kitchen, she was likely going to tidy up the attic room and change out the bedding.

“I’ll use a guest room... is what I’d like to say, but I’d better just hang out near

the stairs, on the off chance that there's some sort of trouble."

"Is your very existence not a threat to myself?"

"Hearing that would make Latina cry, so of course not."

"I suppose that is true."

The deplorable hero's simple argument proved to be strangely persuasive.

And so, Chrysos's first time spending the night was all set up. Alas, no one realized that her three guards had been left behind in the western district and forgotten.

Latina's everyday routine was to finish taking a bath before the Ocelot entered into its nighttime hours. Kenneth and Rita were always busy, so she also used to help out with getting Theo bathed when he was little, and now she did the same for Emma.

Latina decided she would also bathe with Chrysos because she was afraid to take her eyes off of someone who had always been attended by ladies-in-waiting while bathing. And besides, the sorts of magical devices used in Laband didn't exist in Vassilios, so she would probably need help in that regard, too. So, for reasons that Dale could guess at, Latina's loyal pup ended up keeping careful watch outside of the Ocelot's bath.

When Dale finally heard their voices approaching, he figured their bath must have been over. He nonchalantly looked up, only to then freeze in place.

"O-Oh?"

"Dale?" Latina questioned, tilting her head.

"No, it's just... You two really do look alike..."

Dale was plenty accustomed to seeing Latina's everyday clothing. Seeing it on Chrysos, though, was a new experience. Their physiques differed just like their eye colors, but the fluffy knitwear they had on hid the contours of their bodies. It seemed like it would be really easy to confuse the two of them at first glance.

Still, there's no way that I would fail to pick out Latina, of course...

That was a point that Dale refused to cede.

“Wow... It’s piled up quite a bit...” Latina joyfully stated, looking out the window.

The two twins were glued to the window, staring outside like a pair of small children.

“At this rate, tomorrow will be pretty busy.”

“It will?”

“In Kreuz, whenever there’s a big snowfall, the kids always have a snowball fight in the center of town.

“Hmm?”

“Emma’s still too little, so she can’t participate... Theo will probably join in, though. I was thinking maybe I’d go watch,” Latina excitedly explained.

Chrysos, however, didn’t seem to understand at all. Unsurprisingly, as someone who grew up in Vassilios, she had no concept of what playing in the snow was like.

It was becoming a tradition for children in Kreuz to have a snowball fight after a big snowfall, just as Latina had said. That all started, though, on a wintery day the year after Latina arrived.

Dale broke out in a wide grin, reminiscing back on that time.

The day before the snowball fight, Latina had been seriously excited...

†

It was the winter of the year after Latina came to Kreuz, and she was currently nine years old.

That year, there had been a record-setting snowfall. It had already snowed quite a few times that year, to the point that Dale felt like he would never want to leave the warmth of his covers. Latina, however, was getting up early each and every day. That was in part because she wanted a chance to play in the fresh, untouched snow.

Even just a modest coating of snow was enough to greatly interest the children of Kreuz. But when it continued to snow for a few days and then

looked like it was going to clear up, a clear point of contention arose amongst the kids: who would get to play in the plaza at the town's center?

The residence of the town's ruler, the seat of its government, was in the center of the cross-shaped town. At the same time, a plaza had also been constructed there and opened to the public, to give the townsfolk a place for rest and relaxation. This plaza had in turn become an important place to play for the town's children. And with this amount of snow, the possibilities for play dwarfed the usual options.

The topic of who would get to play in the central plaza was a matter of great importance for the children.

"Why don't we all just play together instead of fighting over it? Doesn't that sound like more fun?" a certain girl offered while looking at the falling snow through the window of the school in the temple of Asfar. That was the start of things.

"Everyone together... That does sound like it'd be real fun, doesn't it?" The girl's friend agreed, looking like she was plotting something.

"Just planning out something on that scale sounds interesting... I think I'll just watch, though, since it's so cold out," their other friend added, smiling and gently bringing her hands together.

"Ooh... Sounds like fun. What are we doing? Is there anything Latina can help with?"

There were an unusually high number of girls who were good at getting things rolling in the class this year. The girl who displayed an exceptionally high level of leadership and the one who was extraordinarily skilled at manipulating information managed to skillfully spread the plan to the other children in the school. And thanks to the presence of the remarkably charismatic girl, there wasn't any significant opposition or blow-back. Additionally, that girl's charisma took hold of more than just the children their age.

"Hey, listen! When the snow stops falling, Latina is going to have a snowball fight with everyone!"

"Oh, I see, little lady. You sure are looking forward to it, huh?"

“Yeah. Latina will play a whole, whole lot!”

She reported to all of the regulars of the Dancing Ocelot with a smile, just like that. It was obvious just how excited she was for the event from how wide her grin was.

By the way, when there was a large snowfall like this, a great many requests for snow shoveling from the townsfolk came in to the Ocelot. It wasn't like the adventurers wanted to go out of town and fight magical beasts in weather like this, either. The fact that they worked out to both side's advantage made for quite a few such simple jobs popping up.

As a result, the adventurers spread the news that “Our beloved Fairy Princess is really looking forward to the big snowball fight” throughout all of Kreuz. And in turn, the snowball fight itself became common knowledge.

And then, the day before the snowball fight came.

Latina was fidgety throughout the entire day. She looked out the window over and over and over, absolutely tired of waiting.

“Latina, if you want to go outside that badly, then... Do you want to shovel snow in front of the shop?”

“Yeah!”

“It snows pretty often back in my home village, so I'll teach you how to do it easier. If you do it normally it's pure manual labor, which would be pretty rough.”

Dale wrapped a scarf firmly around Latina, smiling at how the girl had already ran and grabbed her coat.

“Kenneth, is it alright if we pile it up alongside the shop?”

“To be honest, I was thinking it was about time to break it all down... Could you manage it?”

“I can't use Fire magic but, well, Holy magic should be able to handle it, so I was thinking of having Latina help out...” Dale looked to the girl at his side as he said that. She looked distraught at the thought of having to clear away a precious mountain of snow. Seeing that, Dale turned to Kenneth with a strained

smile.

“...Is it alright to leave things like that for a while?”

“Yeah, I suppose.”

Dale wasn't the only one who tended to be soft on the young girl.

“If you're going to be piling it up anyway, how about making a snowman?”

“Snowman?”

“It'll be up to you to make the head, Latina,” Dale said with a smile, then took her out in front of the shop.

They finished with the snow shoveling in no time at all, thanks in a large part to how good Latina was at remembering things. Afterwards, they had plenty of time for playing in the snow. They had already made a big pile of snow while shoveling, and then they put the big snowball they made together on top for the head. Latina's eyes grew wide at the sight of the completed snowman, which was bigger than her.

“I got some charcoal from Kenneth. Do you want to use it to make a face?”

“Yeah!”

Latina squared off with the snowman with a serious look on her face, charcoal in hand. Her tool was pitch black charcoal on a pure white canvas. Knowing that there was only one round in this battle and full of fighting spirit, Latina thrust the charcoal that would serve as the nose into the snowball.

She was surprisingly decisive at times such as this.

“I get the feeling if you make it then it'll end up with an adorable face. I mean, you love cute things, after all.”

Despite the cold, Dale's expression made it look as if he was experiencing everlasting spring. Latina just looked like she was having so much fun, so Dale let her enjoy her time in the snow until Kenneth peeked his head out and yelled, “If you don't bring her in soon, she'll catch a cold!”

The customers who visited the Dancing Ocelot that day were startled by the sight of the king snowman surrounded by numerous subordinates.

The next morning, Latina found her snowman's head on the ground. That made her feel down, but it wasn't enough to crush her fighting spirit for the day. Today was the day of the long-awaited snowball fight, after all. There was no time for wallowing in grief.

"Today's the day that I finally beat Rudy!" Latina yelled out in front of the Dancing Ocelot, working herself up. She was clad in a cream-colored fluffy jacket she was fond of, as well as a matching pink knit hat, scarf, and gloves.

"I wanted to go too... I really, really did..."

"It's not like you can change prior arrangements with them for personal reasons like that, though," Rita said, sounding exasperated.

"Yeah, when it's a summons from the temple... That's technically my primary occupation, after all..."

It was easy to forget, but Dale was officially a high-ranking priest with powerful divine protection. The divine protection granted by the gods was something you were born with. However, he also had received enough training as a priest to hold ceremonies in his home village, which was called the holy land of Quirmizi. And so, his official occupation was as a high-ranking priest of Quirmizi. At the very least Dale himself must have considered the mask he wore of a "hero" who specialized in fighting to be secondary to the skills as a hunter and priest that he had obtained in his training to become head of the village.

There was no helping that, though, as the title of "hero" was an indicator of the ability to serve as antithesis to the demon lords. It wasn't an occupation.

"Still, well... Go ahead and enjoy yourself, Latina."

"Yeah!"

"Ah, hey...! Don't run! That's dangerous!"

Latina had taken off running towards the central plaza with her hands swinging by her sides as Dale saw her off with a smile. When he turned back to the collapsed snowman, though, his expression grew cold.

"Hey, Dale," Sylvester called out, finding Dale in that state on his way to visit the Ocelot.

“Hmm?”

“There are footprints...”

“Well, it was probably the work of drunks...”

“I suppose there’s no lack of those around here...”

“This sort of thing *does* happen a lot.”

“Yeah.”

As the pair held that conversation in front of the fallen snowman, they didn’t break out in even the faintest of smiles. The image of that adorable young girl looking so happy as she finished her snowman remained burned into both of their minds.

The two of them stared for a while at the footprints left behind as evidence.

Just seeing Kreuz coated in pure white was enough to excite Latina. The sort of wooden boxes and assorted junk that could usually be seen cluttering up the roadsides around town were now completely hidden by the snow. In fact, they weren’t just hidden, as the gentle contours drawn by the snow covering them made them look like works of art.

The sudden sound of snow falling from the eaves of a nearby house caused Latina to turn around in surprise. She approached and found a mountain of freshly fallen snow, which she poked at with her foot. The *crunch, crunch* that it made caused her to break out in a smile. Though the temptation to stay there and keep on playing was strong, she resisted it and faced forward.

It may have been the same path she always walked, but moving down it was much harder because of the way her feet kept getting caught in the snow. Though with that said, the southern district was a commercial area aimed at travelers, so a number of shop owners had started shoveling away the snow in front of their stores. At first, Latina took a route through the freshly shoveled paths. That felt somehow lacking, though, so she changed her route to pass through the places where the snow remained piled up.

By the time she made it to Kreuz’s central plaza, she already saw familiar faces scattered about.

It was going to be a large-scale event, but it wasn't as if they had a facilitator or even any firm rules. Still, when Latina saw folks gathering in a corner of the plaza, she went ahead and approached. She found the one in the center of the group giving orders to the children was her brown-haired friend, who was wearing a coat that looked nicer than what kids from the rough part of town would have.

"Good morning, Sylvia!"

"Ah. Morning, Latina!" Sylvia said, waving her hand at her approaching friend.

"What are you doing?"

"The snow's just so cold, you know? So I'll be sitting this one out and just watching. Well, just watching would be boring though, so I've decided to just coordinate things."

"Will you really still have fun, even if you're not playing with everyone?" Latina asked, tilting her head at the way her friend seemed to be enjoying herself even so. Latina couldn't even understand the concept that playing together with everyone could possibly not be fun. To her, the cold was just a minor issue, nothing that would prevent her from enjoying herself.

"It *is* fun... I mean, how could it *not* be enjoyable, getting this many people to move as I please?"

"Huh?"

Latina was already aware that she and her friend had a different sense of values.

"There are other kids who like taking the lead like I do, and also ones who aren't good when it comes to exercise. But it's a big event, so everyone still wants to participate. Here Latina, take one of these."

"Right."

She drew a single stick that came poking out of the box her friend offered her, and found a black mark on the tip. After confirming what she had drawn, Sylvia pointed behind her.

"Latina, you're with the right team. Go join up with your group, alright?"

“Yeah.”

There were a lot of kids gathered together in the direction Sylvia had pointed out. And then a little further away, there was another group. Judging from the way that another child had made a mark on the ground when Sylvia had called out, they were apparently marking the numbers as they decided groups. Yes, Latina had grasped her friend’s actions.

By the way, it was Sylvia’s casual consideration as a manager that led to the teams being divided into “left” and “right.” If they went and carelessly used colors for the team names, especially if one side got to choose red, then the other team would definitely object. After all, even little kids knew that Ahmar was the god of war.

East, west, north, and south could also prove problematic, since those cardinal directions were used in the divisions of Kreuz. All of the children would want to be with the district where they lived, naturally. And on top of that, many kids from the east and south would be sure to have plenty of thoughts about the children from the high class residences to the west. And when it came to the nobles who lived in the north district, some may even hold outright animosity.

Sylvia’s management skills were rather exceptional, to have taken all of those feelings into account.

Latina looked a little relieved when she found one of her friends amongst the right group. She just couldn’t help but feel lonely when she didn’t know anyone.

“Marcel!”

“Good morning, Latina.”

Her darting gaze didn’t spy anyone from their usual group aside from Marcel. Seeing what she was wondering, he calmly stated, “Chloe and Rudy are on the other team. Anthony got pressured into helping out Sylvia. I think he’s wandering around over that way.”

“Latina sees.”

Latina didn’t look to be disappointed by the fact that her best friend was on the other team. That was because she cared more about the news that she and

Rudy were on opposing teams.

In the meantime the number of children grew significantly, and Latina started to see more familiar faces. There were a lot of kids from her class there, and she even had acquaintances who were different ages too, because they had played together in the plaza. Latina had made quite a few friends in this past year and a half.

Already all worked up, the girl declared her objective for the day to her friend. "Today, Latina is definitely going to beat Rudy!"

"Do you really want to beat Rudy that badly?" Marcel inquired as he skillfully mass-produced snowballs. The gentle-natured boy was quite a good listener.

Since Latina didn't want to lose out to Marcel's rate of snowball production, they were soon utterly surrounded by the things.

"Rudy is *always* calling Latina weak, or small, or slow! So Latina doesn't want to lose to Rudy!"

Despite her small build and adorable appearance, Latina was highly competitive. Still, Rudy's physique and stamina gave him the advantage in simple games of tag and the like. Latina wasn't about to simply give up, though.

Rudy's childish teasing was so transparent that his friends all knew exactly who he was fond of, but the girl herself had no idea whatsoever. Not only was Latina born in a foreign nation with its own customs and values, she was exceedingly critical of herself, and sensitive to the hostility of others. The idea of expressing fondness through teasing was completely lost on her. There were many reasons for it, but frankly the greatest was just that she was so naturally airheaded.

And so, Latina wanted to leave Rudy crying uncle someday. She couldn't just accept losing as inevitable. This brought out a level of determination belied by her gentle personality.

Marcel, who knew of his friend's affection for her, just listened with a smile as Latina ignited her competitive spirit, ready to even the score that been piling up day in and day out.

Though they had some management to run things, there had been no time to

properly discuss rules, so the game began with such matters only very roughly defined.

If you got hit by a snowball you were out, and if you took the other team's flag, you won.

A number of walls made of snow had already been constructed here and there about the plaza. It would have taken the children quite some time to set all that up on their own, but for some reason it had already been done. Honestly, it would normally be a big task for adults to handle, too. It really was a mystery...

The teams chose walls on opposite ends of the plaza and made them their forts, planting their flags.

The word that the kids were planning something spread to the adults, and no small number of them gathered around the plaza to watch. To the adults, the big jumbled mess didn't seem like a proper game that could be won. None of the kids seemed to mind, though, so the adults weren't thoughtless enough to throw a wet blanket over their fun by pointing that out.

There were quite a lot of children covering a wide range of ages, and all of them were waiting impatiently for the signal to begin.

"Start!" Sylvia, leader of the group managing the event, yelled out from the center of the plaza, raising what looked to be an improvised handmade red flag. With that signal, those in charge of both camps lowered their own red flags and then banged on metal pots.

Latina broke out in a run the second she heard that sound.

The distance between them was still far enough that the enemy snowballs wouldn't reach her. There was no need to worry, so she could run at full speed. She calmly assessed the situation and plotted out a safe route as she went. All the while, the pompom on her pink knitted hat bobbed along atop her head.

The second she slid behind the barrier she chose as her first shelter, she heard snowballs crashing into it. She had entered into the enemy's firing range.

Rudy's sure to come to the center, so this is where Latina will get him!

She was so confident in that fact because she was well aware of her friend's personality. He was the type to push through using the power provided by his large physique, rather than bother with any clever plans.

Normally that strength of his would bowl Latina over, but today things were a little different. Thanks to the cover of friendly snowballs, she was able to peek out ahead and search for her target.

There he is!

Having confirmed his presence, Latina quickly moved to execute her plan.

Meanwhile, Rudy had also figured out Latina was there. Though that was no surprise, seeing how a small silhouette wearing a familiar pink hat and scarf had come flying out of the pack of children immediately after the start of the game. Even baby bunnies at least have a bit of camouflage to protect them... It did look nice on her, though. Something inside him instinctively urged him towards wanting to grab that big pompom bobbing up and down every time she walked. Every time he did she'd turn and face him with a real glare, but he found that cute, too.

She really is slow, thinking of something like that as hiding...

Her pink pompom was poking up a bit over the wall of her shelter. She was good at studying and supposedly had a good head on her shoulders, but occasionally made dumb mistakes like this.

Rudy moved forward while keeping an eye on the other team. He steadily approached, weaving his way towards Latina's shelter.

I'll settle this in a single shot!

He eyed up the distance, then took a big leap forward. He'd finish things with the snowballs he had in both hands, before Latina even had a chance to fight back. She'd get distracted by his movements, and then the snowball he threw in an arc would come down on her head from above. There was no way someone as slow as Latina could react to that.

The arched snowball landed a blow on the pink hat in no time at all with a *thwump*. Rudy peeked into the shelter, eagerly imagining Latina's frustrated face.

What he saw inside, though, was a pillar of ice supporting a pink hat.

“Huh?!”

The second Rudy realized it was a trap, Latina stood up from a crouched position in the rear of the shelter. Out of the corner of his eyes, the boy saw a light shining brightly.

“Hey...! Using magic’s no fa--!”

Rudy’s shout of protest was cut off midway through by the small avalanche Latina had created.

Within the Holy magic that Latina employed, the defensive wall and attack magics were largely the same sort of power, just used in different manners. Mana used as a shield was defensive, while mana shot off like a bullet was long range attack magic. And bludgeoning something or someone with a mass of mana served as close range attack magic.

Additionally, Latina’s skills at mana control were great enough to make even most adults jealous.

She had spread out a wall made of mana in an instant beneath a layer of snow. Then, she flipped it over.

Just as planned, Rudy ended up trapped in the pile of snow. Latina picked up the large snowball she had created from inside the shelter and held it aloft with both hands. Left trapped and unable to move his body, Rudy could only watch as it came crashing down upon his head. That had been the finishing blow. After all, if he wasn’t hit with a *snowball*, he wouldn’t count as out. She chose some strange ways to be honest about things at times.



“Latina did it! She beat Rudy!” the girl said, throwing her hands up in the air in celebration without even thinking about it. In her joy, she had completely forgotten the fact that she was still in the midst of battle.

“Gwah!”

A snowball had smacked right into Latina’s head with a *thwack*.

Thw-thw-thw-thwack! Immediately afterwards, a volley of concentrated snowball fire descended upon her. In no time at all, the screaming girl was absolutely coated in snow.

“Aaaaaah!”

“We’ve taken the enemy magic user! Close in!”

Latina’s best friend had been the one to raise that triumphant shout.

“Rudy had been a sacrificial pawn from the very start! Now, let’s get moving!”

When it came to things like this, Chloe had no mercy whatsoever.

The result: Victory for the team lead by General Chloe. The adults watching couldn’t help but feel admiration for the way that she gave orders.

“She did it! Latina won!”

In spite of the way things ended, Latina still reported her victory back to the Dancing Ocelot. She may have lost in the team event, but she had won her personal battle.

“You played a lot, Latina, so do you want a bit of a snack?” Kenneth asked.

“Yeah!”

What he handed her was a freshly roasted sweet potato. The way it was slowly heated drew out plenty of sweetness, making it a fine sweet.

The tip of Latina’s nose was red when she came back from playing in the snow, but once she had changed and drank a glass of hot milk with a bit of sugar in it, she was completely back to her normal self.

“On the way back Latina saw some people who were being snowmen, but won’t they catch a cold?”

She uttered that thought aloud, but it didn't take long for her attention to be entirely stolen away by the task of reporting on her victory.

She chowed down on the piping-hot roasted potato, and then drank down her freshly refilled milk. It may not have been the usual beverage for a victory toast, but it still tasted even better than it usually did.

"It's all thanks to your practice yesterday," Dale said with a grin, causing Latina's smile to grow even wider.

That smile of hers made Dale feel just how much teaching her that method of snow shoveling yesterday had been worth it. Dale's home village of Tislow may have been a land that got a lot of snow, but it also had a great deal of magic users. The people favored by the earth living there had nearly endless options for using magic to clear away snow. Thanks to the thinking that if they have the power they may as well use it, they had developed some truly efficient methods.

Dale hadn't been able to go see the snowball fight in person, but because a number of regulars had watched over her valiant struggle, he had already heard all about it in detail.

With that said, though, he naturally still needed to hear the heroic tale from the girl herself.

The troublemakers who had wrecked the large snowman made by a child from the southern district were raked over the coals by fierce looking men, and ended up being forced to see how a snowman felt firsthand. That story also reached Dale's ears, but, well, he had no problems there. He'd be lying if he said he hadn't wanted to pass divine judgment himself, but there would be no meaning to it if that meant cutting down on his time with Latina. It would be a waste of time in the truest sense to spend it on folks like that.

"So do you want to make snowmen together again?"

"Yeah."

"What do you say we try to make a way, waaaaay bigger one this time?"

"Yeah!"

If it was with this smiling young girl, then childishly playing in the snow wasn't so bad. Now, what should they play next...?

What about making it a giant snow sculpture instead?

While thinking such things, Dale popped the bit of sweet potato Latina had given him into his mouth.

†

It was hard to tell if it was because Chrysos had the devil's own luck or some sort of karmic reward for Latina's daily good deeds, but the weather didn't turn to rain midway through. And so, Kreuz awoke to a bright morning with clear skies and plenty of snow left on the ground.

"Ooooh..." exclaimed Chrysos in admiration. She must have been fond of the outfit, as she was dressed like a pink lamb again today. Latina, meanwhile, looked like a slightly more refined lavender sheep as the pair of twins left their footprints in the fresh snow in front of the Ocelot.

The backyard was already a crushed wet mess, from Vint running around it all night. Latina didn't get angry because that was just what a pup instinctively did in such circumstances, but she was still clearly disappointed by the sight. That carefree, easygoing dog seemed to have noticed Latina's mood, as he was now just patiently standing by her feet and wagging his tail.

"I'm heading out, Sis!" the mischievous eldest child of the Ocelot yelled out as he ran on past the twin sisters.

"Have fun, Theo. And may Ahmar's protection be with you," Latina said with a smile, saying a little prayer for his victory in today's battle.

"Platina."

"Hmm?"

"Shall we head forth as well?" Chrysos asked, looking like an excited child.

"Adults can only watch the snowball fight," Latina responded to her sister with a smile, and then started to walk, slow and steady.

Dale took off following them a little further back. After all, these two sisters were natural airheads. If there wasn't anyone watching them, he could

definitely see them joining the children's game and going all-out. And they probably wouldn't refrain from using magic, either.

"Were you perhaps just thinking something rude about me?" Chrysos turned around and asked with a glare, seeming as if she had sensed something.

"No, not especially," Dale responded, swiftly brushing aside the accusation.

"Chrysos, you need to face forward when you're walking or—" Latina started, only for Chrysos to slip, just as she had been worrying about.

"Un...gh...!"

Chrysos's pride, however, wouldn't allow her to take the fall, so she managed to catch herself in a strange stance. She didn't seem to be able to move from it of her own power, though, so she trembled in place.

"Are you alright, Chrysos?"

"Latina, you should probably lend her a hand before you take time asking her that."

Latina did as Dale told her and quickly offered her sister a hand. Having finally regained her footing Chrysos forced a composed expression and glanced at Dale.

"Yeah, yeah. Just make sure you watch what you're doing," Dale apathetically responded, thinking back to the promise he made to a young Latina, which he had recalled just last night.

Even if they couldn't participate in the snowball fight, maybe they could try making a giant slide. With their childlike natures, the sisters would probably go down it at least once or twice. All they would need to do is claim they were testing it out to make sure it was safe before letting the children on.

With Latina and Chrysos's magic and a hand (er, paw?) from Vint, it shouldn't have been that hard to pull off.

Dale walked along steadily, realizing that he was also feeling a bit of childlike excitement at the sight of the town coated in snow for the first time in a while.

The sky had cleared up and was now a brilliant blue, making for the perfect weather for playing.

Dale looked forward to the fresh experience of seeing the sisters play together, knowing this chance wouldn't last for long. He really did still think like a "guardian" every now and again.

Extra Chapter: The Young Girl and the Kitty Paradise

There existed a famous “cat mansion” in the western district.

One day, Latina heard of the place through Sylvester, a regular of the Dancing Ocelot. The girl was very fond of animals, but she tended to let herself get worked up so much that the cats she ran into around town always ended up running away from her. But in a place like the cat mansion with lots of the little critters, maybe she would finally be able to touch one...

Latina was 10 at the time.

This occurred on a certain day after she and Dale had returned from their trip to Tislow.

The start of it all had been a conversation between Latina and her friend Sylvia in class.

“A cat gathering...?!”

The topic they were discussing sounded too good to be true to the young girl.

“That’s right. The cats all get together at night. I saw them in the central plaza, when the sun was going down.”

“Cats... So there are lots of cats?”

“There are. So many it’s crazy.”

Latina started looking more and more excited as the conversation continued on.

“Cats... Cats...!”

“Latina, you’ve just been repeating ‘cats’ for a bit now. Are you alright?” Chloe asked while sweating a bit. Sylvia also gave a laugh, but neither of those seemed to reach Latina.

Lots of cats...! There could be tabbies, and white ones, and black ones too! And if there are a whole lot, then maybe at least one will let Latina pet it!

Her mind was lost in thoughts of a kitty paradise.

Latina was an animal lover.

She had an easy time earning a canine's affection, and they would even approach her. That was clear from the way she had conquered not only all the dogs in Tislow, but the soaring wolves as well. While large examples like those were rare, pet dogs would often come and nuzzle up against Latina when they were on walks.

Cats, however, seemed to want to keep their distance, and that was something Latina was bad at doing. She'd get too excited about wanting to pet them, and they would always end up running away.

As an aside, there was essentially nothing like a zoo in this world. It couldn't be said that literally nothing of the sort existed because there *were* rich collectors who gathered rare flora and fauna, but that wasn't the sort of thing that the common folk would ever lay eyes upon. As a result, most townsfolk only ever encountered a very limited variety of animals. For the most part, it didn't go beyond just pets and livestock.

Latina's way of perceiving certain things was quite surprising. She apparently separated livestock out into their own category, thinking, "Well, they're cute, but their meat is tasty."

She could never become a vegetarian, because meat was just too delicious.

Anyway, the thought of the kitty paradise made Latina's heart dance with joy, but there was a big obstacle in her way: the time.

Latina had permission to walk around on her own, but that was limited to when the sun was out.

Before, she had snuck out during the holy night with her usual group of friends to see magical beings and gotten scolded for it. What seemed to have had a greater effect on her, though, was the realization that she had worried not just Dale, but also Kenneth and Rita. After that, she hadn't tried to go out and play at night.

"Latina wants to see the cat gathering, but..."

However, the main business hours for the Dancing Ocelot were during the night. Latina couldn't bring herself to beg Kenneth or Rita to take her to the central plaza in the middle of their busy hours for such a selfish reason.

Meanwhile, the time when Dale returned home each day fluctuated. And he also came back tired, so Latina didn't want to trouble him unnecessarily. She had always adored him, so she couldn't ever bring herself to make selfish requests of him.

As a result of all that, Latina's desire remained buried in her heart. The adults were all confused when they saw her sitting there, looking downhearted as she ate her dinner.

That night, Latina had a dream. She was surrounded all around by all sorts of cats, which were freely stretching and playing around as they pleased.

She felt like this was true paradise.

The instant that she reached out excitedly towards a fluffy tabby cat, her eyes shot open. She laid there in the covers, thinking how it would have been nice if she could have seen just a little more.

Before she realized it, there were tears flowing down onto her pillow.

Afterwards her heart remained completely captured by the thought of that kitty paradise. All the adults around her could tell that something was off.

She would be absentmindedly thinking something and give a sigh. But then when someone asked about the sad look on her face, she would just shake her head and say, "it's nothing." And then suddenly a happy expression would shoot across her face while she was sitting there lost in thought.

The adults were left bewildered, having no idea what was going on.

On top of that, there was the matter of her "previous offense." The adults all had bitter memories of having sensed something was off but deciding to take a wait and see approach, only for her to break her own horn because she had felt so cornered.

They wouldn't just let this abnormality pass them by.

"Is something wrong, Latina?" Dale suddenly asked with a serious look, acting

on the behalf of all of the adults in the Ocelot.

And so, when Latina desperately explained the reason behind her actions, Dale collapsed in relief.

So cute...!

“Dale?” Latina called out while looking down at him and shook his shoulders, but Dale wasn’t currently able to respond. He felt bad for Latina when she was being so serious, but he felt confident that he was about to start rolling around laughing. His relief only added to that feeling.

That was when Sylvester chimed in about the cat mansion.

“If you just want to see cats, you don’t have to go out at night. There’s a famous cat mansion next to my place in the western district.”

Latina turned and made a face that seemed to exclaim, “What did you just say?!”

Learning that there was another such paradise out there aside from the cat gathering made Latina sense just how small the world she knew still was.

When Dale finally regained his composure and looked up, he found Latina’s attention focused on Sylvester.

It was already too late.

He gave his okay because there was no helping it now, but it was still a shame to have missed out on a chance to hear, “Latina really does love you best, Dale!” He felt like he could just bite down onto his handkerchief and tear it apart.

“Can Latina go to the house next to Mr. Syl’s? Is it alright?”

“Well, it’s right next door, so we know each other well enough. I’ll talk things over with him.”

“Really?! Thank you, Mr. Syl!”

Sylvester broke out in a sloppy grin at the way that Latina thanked him with a wide smile. The smile on Sylvester’s intimidating countenance was so powerful that calling it a “grin” didn’t actually cover it, really.

“He’s a single old man who apparently came from an island nation across the sea, by the name of Gojo Ciges. It’s an odd name, isn’t it?”

“Hmm? Sylvester, could you say that old man’s name one more time?”

“It’s Gojo Ciges. He’s a former adventurer.”

“...I may actually know him,” Dale blurted out after searching his memories. Both Sylvester and Kenneth looked surprised.

“If you’re talking about Old Man Ciges... A lot of folks from our generation of adventurers owe him one, but by the time you got into the business, Dale, he should’ve been completely retired.”

Kenneth should’ve known, because he himself was the one to teach Dale the ropes of being an adventurer.

“I get the feeling... that an old guy with a name like that came to my grandpa’s funeral. My grandpa was an adventurer before he married into the clan, so maybe they knew each other from back then.”

Dale’s grandfather Reinald had married into the unique culture of Tislow from the outside. He was known as a man of character, and despite the fact that he was originally an outsider, there wasn’t a single person in Dale’s home village who would speak ill of him. Just the statement, “Well, he was able to marry Granny Wen” was enough to convince even the younger generation who didn’t know him of how great of a man he must have been. He excelled with the sword as well as magic, and was also cultured enough to act as the teacher for the village’s children before Master Cornelio arrived.

And that man who seemed like he could do anything and everything had went and married Wendelgard. That was talked about by everyone in the village as one of Tislow’s seven wonders. The paradoxical explanation seemed to be, “Well, we’re talking about Reinald, so I can see it being possible.” All of Wendelgard’s potential suitors, not just in the village but the surrounding region, had shrank in the face of the idea. That fact is what made the statement such a heavy one.

Wendelgard may have been the head of the clan now, but when she was young, she threw herself fully into the role of an adventurer. The primary

reason she had undertaken that wandering journey, though, wasn't for training or to spread her renown, but rather to look for a husband.

†

Thanks to an introduction from his neighbor Sylvester, Dale and Latina got a chance to visit Old Man Ciges' manor. When the old-timer heard Dale's background, his reaction was, "You're Wendelgard's grandson...?!" There was an intensity there that you wouldn't generally use with someone you were essentially meeting for the first time.

Faced with that, Dale's reaction was to immediately break into a splendid, pronounced bow.

"I'm terribly sorry for all of the trouble my grandmother has caused you!!"

Dale himself had no idea whatsoever what that trouble might have been. But in his long years as her grandson, Dale had learned that generally in cases like this, his grandmother was the one at fault. And so for the time being, he put his all into apologizing.

Latina's grey eyes went wide with surprise at his sudden actions. And apparently Ciges hadn't foreseen Dale acting like that, either. He smoothed things over by clearing his throat, then began speaking of that nostalgic name in a way that said he had regained his composure.

"That's right. If you're Wendelgard's grandson... Then that also means that Reinald is your grandfather."

His shoulders drooped and he looked somehow exhausted as he said that.

Old Man Ciges lived in one of the upper-class residences of Kreuz's western district. It was a splendid manor, to such a degree that one wondered if it wasn't too much for an old man living on his own. The garden in front of the house was full of carefully maintained, unfamiliar flowers and used a form of landscaping from some foreign nation.

The interior of the manor also had a foreign feel about it. However, it wasn't entirely in a foreign style. Dale could understand that, perhaps because he had been born to the unique culture of the Tislow clan. For example, leaving the reception room where visitors were greeted in a Labandese style just made

things easier in a variety of ways. Though it could be said that was only possible to do because this was a splendid enough manor that it had the room to spare.

And though the reception room the servant had led them to was in a Labandese style, there were still some foreign touches to its ornamentation.

“Wooooooooow!”

Latina completely forgot herself at the sight of the numerous cats present there. Though she valued manners highly, Latina forgot to even greet the lord of the house, instead voicing her glee and bouncing up and down. On top of that, she did a full turn while in that state. Even Dale was surprised by how worked up she was.

“Dale, cats, there are cats! A lot of them! They’re so cute!” Latina exclaimed, her eyes sparkling as she looked up at Dale.

“Y-Yeah...”

She was just so openly overjoyed that Dale ended up missing his chance to reproach her.

And unfortunately, Dale wasn’t the only one affected by the way Latina was acting. The cats in the room all reacted with a start, judging the young girl as dangerous.

Fortunately, Old Man Ciges didn’t show himself in the reception room until Latina had more or less calmed down. That was when Dale had given his self-introduction, and “that” happened.

“Reinalt really was a capable man. He was skilled not only with a blade but also with magic, yet thanks to his affinities he couldn’t use healing magic. And so, he sought out someone who was skilled with it...”

“Ah...” Dale let slip in a strange voice upon hearing of the start of his grandparents’ romance.

You would never guess it from her personality, but his grandmother Wendelgard possessed Holy, Water, and Earth affinities, and was an expert in defensive and healing magics.

“Apparently he was a real lady-killer, so he should have had countless

partners to choose from... So why did he choose Wendelgard?"

"Even as their grandson, I've got no idea."

Dale wasn't the only one, as most of the people in his home village had the same question.

As the Tislow clan were hunters, the techniques they had developed mostly used the bow. That was Dale's specialty as well, though he had also studied swordsmanship to a fair degree. He had received that instruction from his grandfather when he was alive, as well as from his father Randolph, who had also studied under the man. It was a style meant for real combat, but it wasn't an entirely self-taught one.

This old man who had once been one of his grandfather's allies also praised the man's swordsmanship.

"Well, he was also a bit of an eccentric. He didn't seek fame or fortune, and seemed like his goals were a bit different than those of most. Perhaps his ability to handle any problem he was faced with was, in a way, a problem of its own," the old man muttered, seemingly lost in reminiscence. He slowly reached out his bony hand and grabbed his tobacco tray from atop his desk. In a practiced motion he stuffed tobacco into the head of the pipe, which had a dragon engraving, then smoothly moved on to smoking. A single strand of smoke ran up into the air.

Dale didn't even need to stop and think about why the old man's actions felt unusual. Old Man Ciges' pipe was of a type you didn't see in Laband. Dale, however, had seen a similar one often. After all, it was the same shape as his grandmother's favorite one.

"That's..."

"Hmm?"

Old Man Ciges was confused as to what Dale was questioning, but then he noticed that the younger man was looking at his pipe. Using his wrist, he lightly swayed it up and down.

"What about it? Is it that unusual?"

“No, it’s just... My grandmother uses the same sort of pipe. I figured it was from a foreign nation, but...” Dale replied.

Old Man Ciges frowned and let loose an “Ah,” then continued on, “It comes from my old home. Reinalt had me sell him a number of them because he was fond of unusual things, but he himself didn’t smoke, correct?”

“Yeah.”

“Wendelgard must have received it from Reinalt.”

“I see,” Dale responded, thinking back on the pipe his grandmother used. “The pipe my grandmother always uses has a flower engraving on that metal portion...”

Old Man Ciges knitted his brows.

“There shouldn’t have been any like that among the ones he got from me.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I ordered them from my old home, but it would be difficult to do so without assistance...”

At some point in the midst of that conversation, Latina had appeared by their side. The cat toy she was waving in one hand swayed back and forth.

“Are you talking about granny’s smoking?” the young girl suddenly interjected.

“Yeah,” Dale replied, looking surprised.

Latina tilted her head just a bit, then nonchalantly stated, “Granny said that Dale’s grandpa made her smoking pipe.”

Apparently Granny Wen had doted on the young girl so much that the older woman had told her stories even her own grandson hadn’t heard. Immediately after being left dumbfounded for a moment, though, he accepted that as making sense.

For a while now, Latina had been repeatedly coming at the cats with the cat toy, only for them to run away. With this many cats around though, she didn’t get discouraged, and her sights were now locked on a white one atop a shelf

that was higher than she was tall.

“Now that I think of it, I heard that my grandfather came and went to the village’s workshop a long time ago, saying he wanted to learn about the details behind the craftsmen’s work...” Dale said, recalling something he had heard from the old folks back home. As an outsider who married into the clan, Dale’s grandfather knew nothing of Tislow’s techniques for making magical devices. And so, he actively negotiated with the craftsmen to gain access to their workplace. While he may not have gone so far as to touch on the secret techniques of the clan, there was no doubt that he at least learned of their tools and materials.

While Dale was reminiscing on his grandfather, Old Man Ciges wore a look of hesitation, like he was refraining from saying something.

“He really was skilled, able to handle anything and everything...”

“Granny said that Dale’s grandpa wasn’t strong, but he was very handy,” Latina said, conveying a statement she had heard from Granny Wen.

“No, she only said that because she’s so abnormal.”

“Wendelgard is simply an exceptional individual.”

Both men negated that claim at the same time.

“Hmm?”

Granny Wen’s standards diverged greatly from those of the world at large.

“Well, even putting aside Reinalt, there’s a certain degree of demand for foreign goods amongst dilettantes. After I retired as an adventurer, I used my connections to start an import business. If you have any needs, I can make some arrangements.”

“I see...” Dale muttered, remembering that Old Man Ciges was born in an island nation overseas. The countries that employed Eastern Regional, the second most prolific language behind Western Continental (which was the official language of Laband), primarily consisted of islands. Each island had its own unique culture, and the ways they were governed also differed greatly from how things were done on the continent.

Dale assumed Old Man Ciges came from one such island.

“It’s outside of my field of expertise so I don’t know the details, but I hear the religious rituals vary too.”

“Yeah... I think I get that. I mean, there are even differences between my home village and Laband at large.”

“The death rate for children was comparatively high back where I came from. So rituals to pray for children to grow up healthy were very common.”

“Is that so?”

“The common tradition is that once children reach a certain age, nice clothing is ordered for them and a service is held at the temple. Yes...” Old Man Ciges suddenly shifted his pipe. “When they’re just about the age of that girl now.”

His pipe pointed towards Latina, who was getting all worked up over a kitten. It had only been for a little bit, but Latina had gotten to stare at it, and it seemed to be getting slightly used to her presence, too. In fact, apparently the little bundle of curiosity had actually been the one to start staring at her first.

Latina desperately held back the urge to pet it (apparently she was learning) and instead offered the cat teaser to the kitten. The grey-striped little critter was poised to pounce, and when Latina moved the toy with perfect timing, the kitten leapt for it. The young girl’s expression absolutely sparkled at the sight. She was awash in the joy brought about by accomplishing her goal of playing with a kitten.



Seeing that sight, Dale broke out in a grin himself.

And for Old Man Ciges, it was blindingly apparent that his old friend's grandson doted greatly on his adopted daughter.

"It's a ritual to pray for the child's healthy growth. It would be nice to see such a custom spread in this country too, wouldn't it?"

"Well... yeah."

"By the way, the differences in our cultures show in terms of clothing, too. I have much attire that could serve as a sample of such things here in this manor... Right, just like this."

The clothing that the servant had carried in with suspiciously impeccable timing was of a sort not seen at all in Laband. The complex, subtle flower pattern must have required a unique dying method. It used not only vivid colors but also complex shading, giving it the impression of a high-class good that was gorgeous but not overly flashy. That was reinforced further by the smooth, silky feeling of the material.

"They wear clothing like this and pay a visit to the temple."

Dale didn't respond.

"But with that said, since it's a foreign garb, I suppose you wouldn't know how to put it on, right? Well, since I already have it out, how about having her try it on?"

Dale still remained silent.

Old Man Ciges had amassed a fortune by becoming an importer after he retired as an adventurer. There was no way he'd let a sucker who seemed like he'd go and buy expensive goods on a whim slip on by, even if he *was* the grandson of an old friend.

Dale, naturally, was able to see through the old man's plot. After all, he was a man who had learned to conduct himself properly in the den of demons known as "high society."

However, Dale didn't care about anything so trivial as that.

“I feel like a lighter color would be cuter on Latina,” Dale said, wearing a completely serious expression.

“Is that so? Don’t you think that the little lady would be better suited to a slightly bolder color?”

“Latina would look cute in anything! That’s only natural! But I believe that as her guardian, it’s my duty to make sure she looks as cute as possible!” Dale passionately declared. As always, he remained completely unshaken on such matters.

“Hmm?”

Latina tilted her head at the way that her “guardian” had suddenly gotten all heated up, but she didn’t stop petting the purring grey-striped kitten.

“Dale... Wasteful spending is bad, right?”

She was well aware that her “guardian” pampered her far more than most people would.

“Anything spent on you could never be a waste, Latina,” Dale said, looking completely serious. Old Man Ciges, meanwhile, started questioning a bit if he really needed to be pushing for more opportunities to get rich quick.

“Latina will get bigger soon, so... She doesn’t need lots of expensive clothes.”

Plus, seeing the young girl lecture her guardian with a wisdom beyond her years tugged a tad at the conscience of the importer.

The way both her arms flapped up and down as she moved looked absolutely adorable and drew attention to her. But with that said, such an innocent and sweet statement from the young girl only had the opposite effect on the this complete and utter doting idiot.

“That’s true. You’re going to get bigger bit by bit, Latina. So we need something special just for now, when you’re this adorable little size.”

The second she heard that statement Latina seemed to sense something and a troubled look crossed her face. The sort of actions Dale would take in this state were limited.

“Dale... The kitty Latina’s hugging will end up running away, so just a little

longer...”

Latina had finally, *finally* managed to touch a kitten. She was used to being hugged by Dale every day and adored doing that, but it wasn’t what she wanted now. He had both arms held out and was moving to scoop her up, only to suddenly stop midway through. He actually halted himself rather skillfully.

As Latina moved on from the grey-striped kitten to a fluffy black one, Dale and Old Man Ciges moved to discussing the financial details of their transaction.

Latina may have still been learning, but she did receive wages at the Ocelot and had a basic understanding of the value of money. As such, she realized that the prices they were discussing were in a bit of a different league compared to what most people thought of as the price for clothing, but she ultimately decided to pretend she hadn’t heard their conversation. Instead, she immersed herself in waggling the cat toy in front of the kitten. After all, she got the feeling that the conversation was so completely divorced from the sensibilities of responsible townsfolk like herself that she was better off just tuning it out.

By the time Latina came back to her senses, she realized she was being escorted by a servant to a separate area in the back of the reception room.

“Wah?”

In a strangely practiced manner, the servants there stripped off her clothing and garbed her in an unfamiliar outfit. She was conflicted by the excitement of such radiantly beautiful clothing, but the thought that ultimately crossed her mind was, *If Latina gets cat fur on this, it would be really tough to clean...*

There really was a limit to how practical one should be.

The high-class silk fabric drew gentle contours. The wide sleeves swung alongside her movements, making the beautiful patterns drawn on them stand out all the more. The base color was a deep red just like Old Man Ciges had suggested, but the more lightly colored floral pattern following the curves seemed to call to mind flowing water, giving the outfit a generally soft, gentle impression. A wide sash with gleaming golden thread woven into it was tied around her waist, making it seem like she had a big butterfly behind her back.

Her platinum hair was done up in two tails as usual, but in addition to the red

ribbons tying it up, she also had a hairpin in the same flower shape as the patterns on the outfit.

“Latina! You’re soooooo cute!!” Dale yelled out, scooping up Latina and spinning her around the second she stepped out of the changing room.

“Gwaaaah!” Latina let out a shriek like a small kitten.

“She so carefully dressed... so you don’t want to mess it up, right?” Old Man Ciges said, unable to hide his astonishment even after coming this far.

“Man, but you sure are cute, Latina! I mean, you’re always cute, but today you’re like one whole extra step cuter! You’re just too super cute!”

Dale was overusing “cute” to the point that it felt in danger of losing any weight it had. That was nothing new, though.

Still, it was hardly an unpleasant thing to hear. His words left Latina with a wide grin on her face, despite having just been spun around so much.

“It doesn’t look weird?”

“Of course not. You look super cute.”

Latina gave a shy smile, and both her platinum hair with the light flower ornament and the sleeves of her outfit swayed along with her movement. She just looked so adorable that everyone there, not just Dale, couldn’t help but feel warm and fuzzy inside.

“What do you think? Not bad, wouldn’t you say?” the old man asked with a somewhat sly smile on his face. Still, Dale and Latina were both accustomed to being around people whose faces gave an impression that was less than heroic.

“So if you only had such a custom in this country...”

“Getting the temple to do something new, huh...? That’d be pretty tough for me to manage...”

As the temple was no small organization, this was an issue that would butt heads with plenty of conflicting interests and factions. And besides, Dale found dealing with that group to be a real pain and would rather have avoided it as much as humanly possible.

As someone with the rare power of a hero and connections to the influential duke, Dale may have been able to leverage his influence with the temple, but he didn't want to push his luck. To be blunt, just because he *could* do something, didn't mean he actually wanted to.

"I'm not asking that it be right away," the old man said with a laugh, sounding almost as if he was scorning the thought that he may not have long left. "I don't mind if it doesn't happen until you're just a bit more famous. But I'd appreciate it if you remembered this old man's foolish request when you're powerful enough to easily make a temple in a single town do as you please."

Latina looked up with a tilted head at Dale, who wore a strained smile that said he seemed to be having trouble figuring out how to respond. Dale looked back at the girl, and figured that even if it wouldn't be possible to make it a tradition, he could at least take her to the temple for the first time in a while.

"Right, well... In 10 years or so, you'll probably get your hands on at least a bit of authority."

Dale wanted to ask the old man why he seemed so confident, but decided it must have been owing to Dale's extraordinary grandparents. And while he didn't want to be compared to the two of them, to be honest, Dale himself was pretty exceptional by the standards of the world at large.

"10 years, huh...?"

"Hmm?"

Thinking on how much this girl would have grown in that time caused some complex emotions to well up in Dale. She would have to be a full-grown woman by then, right? He was probably just being selfish, feeling forlorn over that thought...

"I can't make any promises, but..."

"Well, for now, this exchange alone is enough for me," the old man chuckled, reminding Dale of his own grandmother's craftiness. Voicing that thought would probably ruin the man's mood, though.

Dale said his farewells as he mulled over his thoughts. Old Man Ciges, meanwhile, saw them off with a bright smile, having received the unexpected

good fortune of a customer who paid in full for such an expensive outfit.

10 years... The old man may have thrown that out there without much deep thought behind it, but in less time than that, Dale's fame as the Platinum Hero had spread the world over. He was marrying the sister of a neighboring country's ruler, so the nation itself would find it difficult to turn him down. As such, exerting authority over a single town would be far from a pipe dream for him.

At the time, Dale had no idea just how accurate the old man's estimate would turn out to be.

Afterword

“I tried to plot out the length of these sequel stories, but they ended up going longer than I expected...” I said to my editor one day after I finished the web version, complaining about my own inability to adjust.

For most of you, this is probably our first time meeting. I’m CHIROLU, and I’d like to sincerely thank you for picking up this work, the seventh volume of *If It’s for My Daughter, I’d Even Defeat a Demon Lord*.

To be honest, after finishing the manuscript for volume six, I went around and declared all over that, “The next volume will be the last one.” To be specific, I even did it at signing events and a dinner party overseas. That had totally been my intention, but then I went and tried counting it out on my fingers and noticed the problem. The whole thing just goes to show the downsides of looking at the compressed writing of the web version on a smartphone.

“If I’m careful about how much I add I could make it fit in one volume, but it’ll be difficult,” I said, only for my editor to respond, “It’s fine splitting it up.”

“Huh? But I said it so clearly...”

“It’s fine to go and split it up.”

“Oh, I see...! So we can go ahead and split it up?!”

Thanks to that exchange, I ended up betraying everyone’s expectations that this volume would be the last one.

As for the “sequel” chapters compiled here, well, I started out writing this series just for fun, so when the time came to sketch out the plot, I realized a certain fact: I didn’t give the twins enough time together... I’d set things up that they got along well, but I didn’t really get to show it. And so, in order to clear away that frustration, I decided to write these sequel chapters.

Thank you so much to everyone who helped make this book a reality. Sorry for all the trouble I caused you by making the titular “daughter” jump all over the time line lately, Kei. And more than anything else, to those of you who

chose this book out of so many options, you have my deepest gratitude.

As long as this book brought you at least a little joy, then I'll feel truly blessed.

February 2018,

CHIROLU

Bonus Short Stories

A Difference Between the Golden and Platinum Girls is Made Clear

“Hmph.”

That day, the gaze of the aloof demon lord known as Chrysos was fixated on the luggage of a customer in the Dancing Ocelot. She really was just like her sister, her curiosity so easily sparked by something new.

However, despite being distracted by the similarity, Dale was sure to give her a warning.

“Don’t go touching strangers’ belongings.”

“Gah.”

Though she looked annoyed at Dale’s scolding, she was also aware that she’d been starting to reach out towards it, and knew she had no rebuttal.

“What’s up?”

“Hmph. I was simply wondering why that person possesses such a thing.”

Dale looked at the customer again. Just a glance at the man’s flashy attire was enough to recognize that he was certainly a minstrel. As the Ocelot operated not just as a bar but also an extension of the temple of Akhdar, minstrels were generally forbidden from plying their trade in the building. The luggage by his side was carefully packed away as a result, but it was undoubtedly his instrument.

Dale wondered why she was asking something so obvious, but then he recalled that they had rather different definitions of what counted as “obvious.” The culture and even the very climates of Vassilios and Laband differed greatly.

“He’s a minstrel... He makes a living by singing about history and legends and epic tales and the like... Don’t you have anything like that in Vassilios?”

“So, one whose trade is to perform music, is it?” Chrysos said with a nod. Dale assumed that she was thinking more of what the people of Laband would call a “court musician.”

She had been raised in such a sheltered manner that it was hard to imagine her so easily grasping such foreign customs.

“Do people in Vassilios not listen to music for pleasure?”

“You speak of the music of the masses? I cannot say that I have not heard rumors of such things, however... I have lived quite distant from the common man.”

“Well, I suppose that’s true.”

“Tell me, what sort of musical performances do they have in this country?”

Chrysos’s interest had been completely captured by the minstrel visiting the Ocelot. Furthermore, the regulars of the shop tended to be quite soft on their favorite adorable waitress, and apparently that favor extended to her identical twin.

Though it wasn’t in exactly the same adorable manner as Latina, Chrysos also undeniably possessed the same sort of aloof nature as her sister. And though it wasn’t as apparent as it was with Dale, people also tended to listen to most of her selfish requests, doting on her like they would an adorable little animal.

Nobody challenged the minstrel as he pulled out his instrument after much pestering. Considering the supposed rules of the shop, it was rather ridiculous the way that Chrysos was leaning forward with excitement as the regulars all happily gazed at her, feeling all warm and fuzzy inside.

The song the musician played was a tale that was quickly becoming a staple in Laband. It had a simple melody line, which led to it being a popular song for children to sing, too.

“Hmm...” Having listened to the song, Chrysos gave a satisfied nod. “I see, that was quite interesting.”

And then, she started to sing the melody she had just heard. None of the regulars of the Ocelot could hide their surprise, and even Dale looked at her in

shock.

“What is that face for?”

“No, it’s just, you...” Dale muttered. “You can sing,” Dale awkwardly forced out, unable to stand her piercing gaze.

“Huh?”

“No, it’s just... I mean, you were actually singing properly...”

“Is this what the people of this country refer to as ‘picking a fight?’ Very well. Do you wish that I bring the force of my nation down upon you in this battle, then?”

Chyros’s indignation was only natural, but there had been a firmly rooted preconceived notion amongst the regulars of the Ocelot. That was why everyone there, not just Dale, had been so taken aback.

Everyone’s beloved adorable waitress was skilled at anything and everything she tried her hand at... except when it came to having a sense of rhythm or pitch. And the twin sisters were so alike otherwise that everyone had assumed that must have held true for Chrysos, too.

“Have Latina sing something for you sometime, and then I think you’ll understand...” Dale replied with a sigh, unable to look the Golden King straight in the eyes.

From the look of suspicion on her face as she furrowed her brows, Dale could tell that Chrysos wanted a further explanation. However, Dale and the shop’s regulars were all simply far too soft on their beloved adorable waitress. None of them felt comfortable so clearly pointing out a fault of hers. And besides, they all found that her having a bit of trouble with that just made her all the more adorable.

And so, thanks to that shameful fact, Chrysos’s question was ultimately left unanswered.

The Matter Avoided Due to the Young Man’s Deplorable Nature

“Dale, this sweater’s gotten all worn out. Don’t you think it’s about time to get rid of it?” Latina asked while looking through the clothing box in preparation for winter.

It wasn’t the norm for new clothes to be sold by hanging them up on display. Rather, people would generally either have new clothing made by order, or seek out secondhand clothing. As Latina was skilled with a needle though, she could handle everyday clothing on her own for the most part. That was especially true for knitted winter wear, which was a specialty of hers.

“But...”

Dale was unusually hesitant, considering how he was usually so unconcerned about how he dressed.

He held up the old sweater in both hands, unable to hide his distress. He had carefully removed any bits that had started pilling, but it had still ended up getting all worn out.

“I mean... this is the first sweater you ever made for me, you know?”

Latina blinked her big grey eyes and then replied, “So you remembered...”

“Of course I did. You had made me scarves and stuff before, but you said sweaters were tricky and that you had trouble making one, right?”

“It really was tough. I mean, I don’t know if it’s because of the amount of strength you use or what, but you can end up with sleeves that are different lengths even using the same number of steps...” Latina said with a bit of a pout. She hadn’t started working on anything for Dale until she had built up some degree of confidence in her knitting skills.

“Still, you made so many of them for Theo, saying it was just for practice...” Dale immaturely grumbled.

“That’s because Theo doesn’t care much about the details of things like that... And besides, he was still growing, so he wouldn’t wear them for long anyway...” Latina muttered. The fact that she reacted like that was because she had gotten to know Dale so well.

Latina had taken up the needle as a child thanks to the influence of her best

friend and sewing teacher. It had all started with her seeing knitting needles and wool in Chloe's house and asking what they were for.

The first thing that Latina completed after giving her all under the guidance of her friend was a simple scarf, lacking in any sort of pattern or frills. However, it ended up shorter than she had expected, and the width was inconsistent throughout the scarf, leaving Latina to slump her shoulders in disappointment.

"It ended up all shaky, somehow..."

"You're worrying too much. I mean, it's pretty tricky to make sure you use the right amount of strength while you're knitting," Chloe said to comfort her friend. But when Latina saw how clean and straight the one the girl had made as an example was in comparison, her spirits sunk even lower.

However, Dale was utterly overjoyed when he saw what Latina had made.

Well, he had been a doting idiot back then, so it was only natural that he'd want Latina's first bit of knitting. And above all else, he would have been absolutely furious if someone else were to snatch it away.

And so, Dale ended up bragging about his handmade scarf from Latina at any and every opportunity.

Dale wasn't the only one who was proud of her, as the regulars could all also tell how hard the young girl had worked just from looking at it. Even so, she couldn't help but feel dissatisfied with her work. Sadly, though, in his deplorable state, Latina's guardian didn't notice just how embarrassing him showing it off was for her.

"Next time, Latina will make something way better and give it to you, Dale."

"Right, I'll be looking forward to it!" Dale responded in a happy-go-lucky voice, not noticing the determination behind her statement.

Afterwards, it took quite a while before she made something she had enough confidence in to give to Dale.

The Little Girl Sees Snow for the First Time

"It sure is chilly today... Hm?" Kenneth muttered to himself and then looked

out the window. He gave a nod of understanding.

It was the winter of Latina's first year in Kreuz, when she was eight years old.

"Snow, huh...? Guess that explains why it's so cold. Looks like I'll have to prepare more stew and the like for today..."

"'Snow'?" Latina questioned, tilting her head as she looked up at him.

Kenneth stopped and thought for a moment, only for Dale to swoop in and scoop the girl up.

"What is it about the snow, Latina?" he asked.

"What's snow, Dale?"

"Huh?"

While Dale was left caught off guard, Kenneth was able to offer a precise reply thanks to the extra time he had taken to think things through.

"Snow is what happens when rain gets all chilly and comes falling down. You know, like how water freezes when it gets cold."

"Frozen rain..."

"You've never seen snow before, Latina?"

"Maybe she comes from somewhere that it never snows," Kenneth speculated while gazing out the window. He caught the pure white snow constantly falling from the gloomy grey clouds overhead in the palm of his hand.

"This is snow."

Latina's eyes went wide as she saw the warmth of his hand cause it to soon melt and become a drop of water.

"Waaah..."

She tried to copy him, but she was so short that that proved highly difficult, even standing on her tippy-toes. Her hand got close enough that it felt like it would reach the fluttering snowflakes, but it ultimately came up short. She hopped up and down with her arms stretched out, and just when she finally thought she had one, she found that it had gone and melted before she could

even check.

“It’s cold, so we really need to go ahead and close it.”

“Right.”

He felt bad leaving Latina with such an unsatisfied expression on her face, but if he let her curiosity run rampant, the carefully maintained warmth in the shop would get sucked out all at once. It was Kenneth who had made the decision, but contrary to his expectations, Latina actually agreed.

Kenneth breathed a sigh of relief. However...

That day, whenever he looked out into the shop, he found Latina staring out the open window. Unsurprisingly, that led to protests from the regulars, until eventually Dale and Latina ended up going to play outside, settling the matter.



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If It's for My Daughter, I'd Even Defeat a Demon Lord: Volume 7

by CHIROLU

Translated by Matthew Warner Edited by Christopher Foxx

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